



DEVILS WILL RISE

Melnikov's Legacy

Born Into
SIN

← BOOK ONE →

A DARK MAFIA ROMANCE

SONJA GREY

Born into Sin

A Dark Mafia Romance

Devils Will Rise: Melnikov Legacy

Book 1

Sonja Grey

OceanofPDF.com

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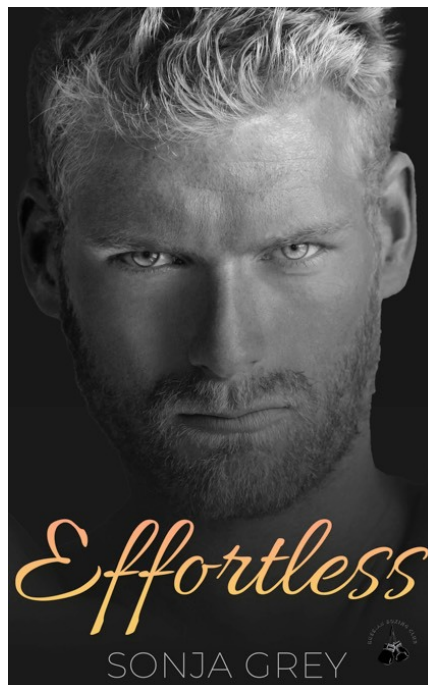
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Also by Sonja Grey

All series are interconnected, unless noted, and can be read as stand-alones, but they're more enjoyable if you read them in order.

All are in KU!

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Melnikov Bratva

(Should be read in order)

Paved in Blood

Paved in Venom

Paved in Rage

Paved in Hate

Paved in Fire

Devils Will Rise: Melnikov Legacy.

Born into Sin

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Author's Note

Dear Readers,

This is the first book in the second generation series for the Melnikov Bratva. Unlike the first series, these can be read in any order, but it'll be so much more enjoyable if you start with this book and work your way through.

If you haven't read the original Melnikov series, then you can get it [here](#)! They should be read in order, and they are all available on Kindle Unlimited and will soon be releasing in Audible.

This series picks up eighteen years after the original series (twelve years after the extended epilogue in Paved in Fire).

I hope you enjoy Dominic and Natalya's story!!

Much love,
Sonja

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Melnikov Family

EMILY MARSTON & ROMAN MELNIKOV



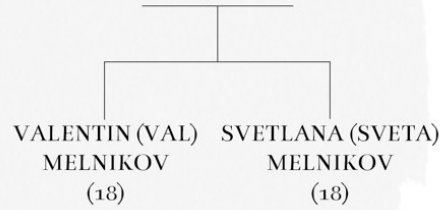
SIMONA PUSCASU & DANIL MELNIKOV



JOLENE ROUSSEAU & LEV MELNIKOV



KATYA LEBEDEV & VITALY MELNIKOV



ALLNA MELNIKOV & MATVEY MELNIKOV



Blurb

She's everything I was never supposed to want.

Dominic:

Eighteen years old, a Bratva princess, and Lev Melnikov's daughter.

That should be enough to keep me away,

but the second I see Natalya all grown up,

I know she's mine.

I try to fight what I feel for her,

but my *principessa* is determined to bring me to my knees,

and she's willing to do whatever it takes to get me there.

Natalya:

He's the head of the Alessi family, more than twice my age, and friends with my dad.

That should be enough to keep me away,

but I'm lost to him the second he comes back to America wearing his signature Armani suit and sexy smile.

He tries to fight his attraction, but when a dangerous situation lands me at his house and under his protection, I know it's only a matter of time before he takes what he wants.

Loving Dominic is dangerous,

but being possessed by him might just destroy me.

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Trigger Warning

This book contains all the elements you would expect from a dark mafia romance.

This is not a fade-to-black book...like at all. Expect dark, on-page content.
This book is not recommended for sensitive readers.

This story does contain graphic violence, attempted sexual assault against the FMC (not by the MMC!!) as well as consensual, explicit sex scenes, and mature language.

This is an age gap romance—a big one—so please skip this book if that's not something you enjoy reading.

The men I write are fiercely loyal and protective. They will kill anyone (seriously, anyone!) who dares to hurt the women they love, but they're big softies for their women. They tend to fall hard and fast, and there will never be any cheating in my books!

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Chapter 1

Dominic

I watch my father take his last breath as I let out the one I've been holding. His hand, once so strong, grows limp in mine while I try like hell to feel something, but there's nothing there. I feel empty and vacant, the same damn way I've felt for years.

A big piece of my heart died when my sister was murdered, and I haven't been able to get it back. When we found the sex-trafficking bastard who took her, my father and I took turns torturing him, and it had given us both some much-needed peace, but it could never be enough to take away the pain of losing her. We both knew that going into it, but it hadn't stopped us from trying.

That was eighteen years ago, and I still carry around the pain of losing her. It might have dulled over the years, but it's still there, and I've resigned myself to the fact that it will never go away. The truth is I'm not so sure I want it to. It's the last piece of her I have, and I'm not willing to part with it.

Squeezing my father's hand one last time, I stand and then let it go. He'd held out longer than I thought he would. Isabella's death nearly killed him, especially after losing our mother only a few years earlier, but his anger and need for revenge had kept him going. After he'd gotten it, he'd held onto the anger until he couldn't keep it bottled up any longer. The doctor said the stroke was a long time coming. I have to agree with him on that. I never thought he would make it to eighty, but he'd surprised all of us.

When I leave the bedroom, my Uncle Salvatore is ready and waiting. One large, beefy hand squeezes my shoulder as much as the arthritis will let him while he pats my cheek with the other.

“You were born to lead this family, Dominic, and you’ve been doing a hell of a job of it ever since Isabella’s death, but now it’s official.”

I nod and scrub a hand over the light beard that’s in need of a trim. I’ve been unofficially running this family for almost two decades. For me, this is just another fucking day of work. The only thing that’s changed is my title. I’m no longer the underboss. My dad’s death means I’ll be addressed as don of this family, and that’s about all that’s changing.

Nodding to my uncle, I walk past him to the hall where two of my cousins are waiting. Dario and Alessandro Alessi lean against the wall, eyeing me cautiously. Whatever they see has Sandro pushing off to give me a respectful nod while saying, “Sorry for your loss, boss. Uncle Antonio was a good man.”

“One of the best,” Dario agrees, smacking my shoulder in a show of comfort, because he sure as fuck knows better than to try and hug me.

“I need a drink,” I tell them, walking past to my office, knowing they’ll follow me. I’ve been in Italy for the last year, and as much as I love my country, it no longer feels like home. I’m anxious to get back to America. I’ve worked hard to make the Alessi Mafia something to be feared, and with the help of an alliance that I never saw coming, I’ve secured more power and wealth than our family has ever seen. The Melnikov Bratva and the Alessi Mafia have control of one of the biggest cities in America, and we intend to keep it that way. My mafia runs the eastern and northern areas now, and the Melnikov Bratva runs the western and southern areas. For the most part, our men stay on our own sides, but there’s always a little bit of overlap. I allow his men to transport shipments through our territory, and they extend the same courtesy to me.

So far we’ve managed to not kill each other. We’ve actually grown quite close over the years, and I tend to think of them more like family—the wilder members who show up to family gatherings covered in tattoos with chips on all their damn shoulders, but family nonetheless.

Pouring myself a whiskey, I motion for the others to grab a glass and then sit down. Dario and Sandro have just taken the two chairs in front of my desk with their own drinks in hand when their dad walks in. I wave a hand at my uncle, making it clear he should just help himself, and once he’s taken the leather seat beside his oldest, he raises his glass in a toast.

“To my brother Antonio, may he finally find the peace that was denied him in life.”

We raise our glasses and drink to my father and the peace that he may or may not have found. I'm on the fence about religion, but I hope my uncle is right. I hope he's reunited with my mom and Isabella and is at peace.

"So," my uncle begins, "what are your plans, Dominic?"

I sigh and look out the large window that faces the Ionian Sea. I've lived in this house since I was born, and there's no denying the beauty of the southeastern coast of Italy, but I know where I belong now, and it's not here.

Looking back at my uncle, I say, "I'm going back to America. I've been gone too long as it is."

He looks like he wants to argue, and when he manages to bite his tongue and keep quiet, I let out a soft laugh.

"That looks painful, Uncle Salvatore. Just spit it out. We've always had honesty between us."

He looks relieved to not have to hold his words back and lets out a sigh at what had clearly been a battle of wills before saying, "Your family is here and your home is here. You should find yourself a nice Italian girl and get married, start a family. You need heirs, Dominic."

I groan, because I've heard this a million fucking times from him, while Sandro lets out a soft laugh because he knows how much I hate the *you need to get married to a nice Italian girl* talk. "My place is in America now. You know this, and I have no desire to marry."

The very thought of marriage makes me feel like I'm suffocating, the air slowly being cut off as I'm trapped in a situation I have no desire to be in. I've never met a woman I can tolerate for long. A few dates, a few fucks, and then I'm done. I've never wanted anything more, and I've always been very upfront about that. They want the Alessi name, the money, the designer clothes I can buy them, and the bragging rights of being on my arm. They don't give a fuck about me, but that's only fair since I don't give a fuck about them either.

My Uncle Salvatore refuses to accept my decision to remain single. He'd married my Aunt Maria when he was young, and he swears it's the best thing that's ever happened to him. I know my uncle. I know all about his various affairs over the years, but he's always said that coming home to Maria is what's kept him sane. He never wanted to be the boss. He's always been more than happy to be the muscle behind the scenes, but his days of killing are over—about eighty pounds of extra weight and arthritic hands

have seen to that. Probably for those same reasons, his days of whoring around are also over.

“It’s not good to be alone,” he tries again. When I meet his dark eyes, he adds, “Isabella would have wanted you to be happy.”

I narrow my eyes at the mention of my sister, letting him know he’s on dangerous ground. He backtracks and holds up one of his broad hands. In his prime those hands were feared, but now he can’t even straighten his fingers out. They remain in a constant bent position that I know he despises. No one enjoys becoming weak, but it’s even worse when that weakness is so obvious to others, especially in our line of work.

“I’m going back to America,” I tell him, my tone making it clear that it’s not up for discussion. “As soon as my father is buried, I’m leaving, and I’m taking Dario and Sandro with me.”

His grey, bushy eyebrows raise at that. I look over at my cousins, not at all surprised to see Sandro grinning while Dario gives me a wary look. I hadn’t discussed this with them, but I need them with me. I’ve divided my time between these two countries long enough. I’m tired of all the travel and stress. My future is in America, and that’s where I need to be. My top men are coming with me.

“What? Why are you taking them from their home?”

“They’re mine to do with as I please, Uncle Salvatore. You know that.”

My cousins swore an oath to this family, the same as we all did, and that means they’re mine. They will bleed for me, they will die for me, they will do whatever the fuck needs to be done for this family, and that means both their asses will be coming with me to the States.

“What about Italy?”

I look back at my uncle, feeling my patience start to dwindle as I take another drink. “What about it? The other families haven’t tried to encroach on our territory in a very long time. We have an agreement with all of them, and I see no reason for that to change. I won’t be as active here, they know that, but I also won’t be interfering with their shit, and that’s all they really care about. If things change in the future, I’ll deal with it, but right now, there’s more money to be had in America. I have a good thing going there, Uncle, and I’m not about to lose everything I’ve worked so damn hard for.”

“You mean with the fucking Russians?”

He looks like he wants to spit over his shoulder after he says it, but instead he tips his glass and finishes his drink.

“They’ve been loyal friends to me, and without them we wouldn’t have found Isabella’s killer,” I remind him.

“Papà,” Sandro starts to say, but Salvatore waves a hand at him, and even though my cousins are both in their thirties now, they respect their father too much to speak over him.

After a few seconds, Salvatore sighs and says, “Will you at least let your Aunt Maria introduce you to one of the nice girls from the village? She’s been pestering me for weeks about this girl she knows from Mass.”

When he sees that I’m about to protest, he quickly says, “I swear I’ll shut the hell up about marriage and you taking my two sons, my *only* sons,” he emphasizes, “away to America.”

I sigh and scrub a hand over my jaw.

“If you don’t agree to this, I’ll never hear the end of it. I’m begging you. Have pity on an old man and just agree to meet with her. She’s twenty-five,” he says, like that’s supposed to make it better.

“Too young,” I say. “I’m forty-three, Uncle.”

He gives a soft laugh and looks at his sons. “Too young?”

Dario joins in and shakes his head. “It’s not like she’s eighteen, Dominic.”

Knowing there isn’t a chance in hell this is going to lead anywhere, I finally nod my head. “Fine. I’ll meet with her, but I’m holding you to your word. No more talk of marriage and no more lectures about America.”

My uncle smiles. “You’ve saved me from a lot of grief. Maria will be so happy when I tell her.”

“Can I at least get my father buried before this godawful setup?”

Salvatore puts his curled, stiff hand against his heart. “My brother’s death breaks my heart, Dominic, but I’ve had a long time to prepare for this. We all knew it was coming.”

He’s not wrong. My father lived a long life, even if it was filled with sadness and violence. His death wasn’t a shock to anyone. If anything, we’re all relieved it’s over. Antonio Alessi was more than ready to leave this world. I think he’d been wishing for it for years. I down the last of my drink, more than ready to get this over with and get back to America.

* * *

Two weeks later, my ass is being lead through the house by my very bossy and insistent aunt.

“Aunt Maria, don’t get your hopes up,” I tell her for the tenth time in the last twenty minutes. I can see the wedding plans taking place behind her warm, brown eyes, and that shit needs to stop. I gently reach out and squeeze her bony shoulders. She’s as petite as Salvatore is large, but there’s a strength to my aunt that goes beyond her small frame.

“Nothing is going to come of this,” I tell her, trying to not sound like an ass.

She smiles up at me and gives my cheek a soft pat. “She could make you very happy, Dominic. She’s a sweet girl. Never married, helps look after her parents, beautiful.” She smiles even bigger. “Good birthing hips.”

“Jesus,” I groan and then raise my hands in apology for the blasphemy.

She points a finger at me. “You need a woman to look after you.”

Without giving me a chance to respond, she spins on her heels and marches to the front sitting room. When we walk in, there’s a young woman already sitting in one of the chairs that never gets any use aside from short visits like this one is most definitely going to be. The woman is blonde, tall and curvy, and looks scared to death when she sees me. Jumping up, she meets my eyes for all of one second before dropping them and fidgeting with the dress she’s wearing. She’s chosen black—a proper mourning dress that is both respectful and modest and absolutely boring as hell. She’s pretty, there’s no denying that, but I feel nothing when I look at her. Well, that’s not true. I feel irritated and bored and wishing I was already on my flight home.

“Dominic, I want you to meet Beatrice.”

Aunt Maria beams up at me and then looks at the woman.

“Beatrice, this is my nephew Dominic, the one I’ve been telling you about.”

I force a smile and hold out my hand. “Nice to meet you, Beatrice.”

She holds her hand out, and I can see the slight tremor in it. Good god, she’d probably have a heart attack if I went in for a kiss, not that I have any intention of doing that.

“Nice to meet you.” Her voice is whisper-soft, and her hand in mine is limp and clammy. I let it go and have the sudden urge to shake her shoulders in annoyance. There’s something about her timidity that irritates the hell out of me. I know it’s fear because of who I am, but I don’t have a

reputation for abusing women, and there's no reason for her to be acting like this.

I look at my aunt and raise a brow at her. I feel like my work here is done, but her expression makes it clear this little meeting is far from over. Biting back the heavy sigh I want to give, I motion to the couch and say, "Please, sit down, Beatrice. Would you like something to drink?"

She looks at where she'd just been sitting and quickly sits back down again. "Um, a glass of water would be great. Thank you."

Water isn't going to cut it for me, so when my aunt looks over, waiting to see what I'll take, I say, "A whiskey." Before she walks away, I add, "A double."

I see the slight shake of her head, but she doesn't say anything before walking out to get our drinks. We have staff who could easily bring us whatever we want, but I know this is my aunt's way of giving us some alone time so we can presumably fall in love. Fat fucking chance of that happening.

Resigning myself to a few minutes of hell, I sit down and put my focus on the scared woman in front of me. "So where do you work?" I finally ask to break the awkward silence.

"I work at my family's bakery." Her eyes briefly meet mine. "I brought some pastries with me. Your aunt took them into the kitchen."

"Thank you," I tell her. "I'm sure they're delicious." I pause, running my eyes over her, noticing how uncomfortable she is. "Tell me something, Beatrice. How did my aunt convince you to come here?"

Her eyes jump to mine, worry written all over her face.

"Relax," I tell her as gently as I can manage. "I'm not mad. It's just that you don't look thrilled to be here."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Alessi," she whispers.

I raise a hand to try and calm her down. "Call me Dominic and, again, I'm not mad. I just want you to tell me the truth. My aunt can be," I stop and give a soft laugh, trying like hell to think of a nice word I can use before settling on "pushy." I shrug my shoulders and settle back into the couch, resting one elbow on the arm rest. "She means well, but she's determined to see me married, but the truth is I want nothing to do with it."

I'm surprised when she meets my eyes and lets out a relieved breath. "You don't?"

“No. I’m going back to America tomorrow. I’m sure you’re a very nice woman, but I’m not interested, and I’m guessing I’m not the only one.”

The corner of her mouth lifts up in a soft smile. “I was too scared to tell your aunt no. She’s been talking about you to me for weeks, but the truth is I’m in love with someone else. He’s a baker at our store, and we haven’t said anything to our families yet, and, well, you’re you, so I knew I couldn’t just say I wasn’t interested.”

When Beatrice speaks about the man she loves, she finally shows me a bit of backbone, and I can’t help but admire it.

“The man you love, what’s his name?”

“Emilio.” She’s unable to hide the smile when she says his name.

“Has he proposed?”

Her cheeks blush at the question. “Not officially because he wants to talk to my father first, but I know he loves me and wants to marry me. He was also waiting to talk to you when it was appropriate, to get your family’s blessing. We were so sorry to hear about your father’s passing. It seemed wrong to talk of marriage when you were still mourning.”

Before I can say anything my aunt comes walking back into the room, drinks in hand and a big smile on her face. I take my whiskey and raise it up in a toast.

“To Beatrice and Emilio, I wish you both a lifetime of happiness.”

Beatrice smiles and drinks her water while my aunt looks between us with a frown on her face. “Well, this didn’t go quite like I’d planned,” she mutters.

I laugh, feeling much better about our forced meeting now that I know my ass is off the hook. Emilio is getting married, not me. I look up at my aunt. “Please send an appropriate gift to Beatrice’s family and offer them my sincerest congratulations.”

We all know what that means. Nothing happens in this part of Italy without my family’s consent, and I’ve just officially given it. My aunt surprises me by grabbing the drink from my hand and tossing back the last of the whiskey. I laugh while she rolls her eyes at me.

“This isn’t how I imagined this visit going.”

“I tried to tell you, Aunt Maria, but you never listen.”

“I listen when something is worth listening to,” she argues, but because she really is a sweet woman, she turns to Beatrice and smiles. “At least someone is getting married.”

Beatrice returns her smile, looking a hell of a lot more relaxed than when she first walked in, and with the weight now off my shoulders, I feel more at ease too. This may not have gone how my aunt wanted, but this meeting was never going to end with me being in any way involved with the woman sitting across from me. The fact that she's in love with someone else just makes it all the easier for me to walk away.

After a few more minutes of my aunt gathering enough details so that I know the whole town will know everything before poor Emilio gets a chance to ask Beatrice's father for permission, I finish the drink my aunt was kind enough to refill and stand.

"I'm sorry, but I need to prepare for my return flight," I tell them.

Beatrice smiles and shakes my hand again. "Thank you, Mr. Alessi."

I don't bother correcting her again. Most people don't feel comfortable calling me by my first name, not around here anyway. There's too much behind the Alessi name, too much tradition and fear mixed with it, and it's been instilled in them since birth. It's not an easy thing to just ignore.

Saying goodbye to both women, I walk back to my office, more than ready to get my ass back to America. Once I'm sitting behind my desk, a text comes in, and I'm not at all surprised to see Vitaly Melnikov's name pop up on my screen.

Dominic, you ever coming back? Should we just take your part of the city and add it to ours?

I let out a soft laugh at the Russian fucker's audacity and remind him that my dad just died and I've been tying up loose ends.

Sorry, I have to remember that normal people like their parents. Ours sucked. It's a miracle I turned out as perfect as I am with the two assholes who made me. Antonio was a good man. I guess this means you're officially the don. I'll have to rewatch The Godfather so I know how to behave. I'm not kissing your goddamn ring, so don't ask me to.

I laugh even harder and type out my response. *I think you might be thinking of the Pope. Also, I don't wear any rings, so you're safe.*

Thank fuck. Get your Italian ass back to America. It's been years since you've seen the kids. The twins are eighteen now. Can you fucking believe it? We're all getting together this weekend at the house in the country. I'm going to tell everyone you'll be there.

I groan at the idea of a huge family gathering. *I haven't agreed to come yet.*

His response is immediate. *See you at seven on Saturday. Bring some of those cannoli I like. The real shit, don't stop at a grocery store on your way. I'll know if it wasn't made in Italy. Don't be that guy, Dominic.*

He adds the smiling emoji, because of course he fucking does. Beatrice's family's bakery is on the way to the airport, so I guess I'll be stopping in there for some authentic cannoli, because god forbid I be *that guy* and try to feed Vitaly subpar dessert.

Looks like I'll be attending a huge Melnikov family event after all.

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Chapter 2

Natalya

“**M**om and Dad are going to have a fit, Mia.” I look at my little sister, eyeing the new piercing she’s given herself. It’s just a second piercing on her earlobes, it could’ve definitely been a hell of a lot worse, but they’re still going to lose their shit when they see it.

“I wanted them,” she says, reaching up to touch the little skull earrings. “And I knew they’d never agree to it, so I just did it myself. It’s not that big of a deal. It’s not like I did my lip like I wanted.”

“Don’t you dare,” I quickly say, eyeing my fourteen-year-old sister. “You can’t just go around piercing yourself, Mia. You could hurt yourself.”

“Oh god, what’d Mia do now?”

We both turn at the sound of our brother’s voice. Sasha is sixteen, age-wise right in the middle of us, but he’s already more than a head taller than me. He grabs a coke from the fridge and I can’t help but notice his bruised knuckles. He’s always getting into fights at school. He’s very careful to not get caught, but trouble always seems to find him, or maybe it’s just that he’s always finding trouble. My brother is nothing but nice to his family, but I’ve seen the look in his eyes when he’s in the middle of a fight, and it worries me. Sensing my concern, he gives me a smile, letting me know he’s okay, and then he looks Mia over, trying to figure out what’s different about her.

When he spots the earrings, he lets out a soft laugh. “It could’ve been worse,” he says, mirroring my own thoughts. “Cool skulls, little sis.”

She smiles up at him and grabs a bag of chips. When our parents walk in, Mia untucks her auburn hair from behind her ears, letting it fall down and cover her disobedience. My dad gives us a big smile, and seeing him

solves the mystery of Mia's obsession with piercings. He has a lip and eyebrow piercing, making him stand out at every school function we've ever had. Well, that and his tattoos. The Melnikov family doesn't blend. Our family is huge and tattooed and that's not even mentioning all the illegal shit. My dad and uncles run the Melnikov Bratva, the most feared and dangerous crime organization in the city. It's something that my cousins and I all know about, but we also know that it's never to be discussed outside of the family. Loyalty is everything, and I'd never go against the people I love.

My mom gives me a quick hug on her way by while my dad kisses my head. "Hey, princess, how's it feel to be a high school grad?"

I laugh and sit at the barstool. "The same as I felt last week," I tell him, "except now I don't have to wake up and suffer through math class."

He laughs and kisses my head again before leaning down to hug Mia. Sasha and I try to distract him by asking about supper, but our questions die in the air when he pulls back a strand of Mia's hair and sees the skull earrings that are impossible to miss.

"What the hell?" he growls in Russian, making our mom immediately look over.

"Mia, another piercing?" Our mom steps closer, eyeing the earrings and then meeting my dad's eyes before sighing and looking back at their youngest child. "I thought we agreed that you'd just get your ears pierced for now."

"It is just my ears," Mia quickly says, and I swear my dad's fighting a grin.

"*One* ear piercing," our mom says.

"Did we agree on just one?" Mia looks between them. "I don't remember that."

Our dad examines her ears to make sure they don't look infected. "Where was Grigori? How did you get past him?"

Mia shrugs. "I did it myself."

Our mom lets out a heavy sigh and points a finger at our dad. "These are your genes at work here."

He laughs and wraps an arm around her before kissing her cheek. Our dad looks between me and Mia and Sasha, a big smile on his face, making his lip ring stand out even more as he says, "Your mom's clearly confused. Any disobedience is obviously coming from her. I've always been a rule follower."

We all laugh because *rule follower* is the last thing that comes to mind when I look at my dad.

“It could’ve been a lot worse,” Sasha reminds them.

Our dad groans. “Don’t say that. I don’t want to think about what that could mean.” He points a finger at Mia with his other arm still securely wrapped around our mom. “No more piercings, Mia. I’m serious. No piercings or tattoos or whatever the hell you want to do that will give me grey hairs until you’re at least eighteen.”

She smiles up at him. “How old were you when you started getting piercings?”

“Not relevant, little witch” he quickly says, using the nickname she’d given herself years ago. Dad’s always called me his little princess, and when he tried to call Mia the same thing, she’d stomped her foot and insisted she was a little witch instead. I can always hear the love in his voice when he uses it.

Mia laughs. “Uncle Vitaly said you were fifteen when you got your lip pierced.”

Our dad groans. “You should never trust anything your Uncle Vitaly says.”

“So it’s not true?” Mia asks, letting out another laugh because she knows she’s got him.

“*Malinkaya*,” he says, using the nickname he always calls our mom, “our little wild child is asking too many questions again. What should we do with her?”

He tilts his head like he’s considering a million different punishments while our mom says, “Maybe we should make her do everyone’s laundry for two weeks.”

Mia cringes while our dad laughs. “Or maybe we’ll only allow her to wear pink for a week.”

“You wouldn’t,” Mia whispers, but she knows he’s only joking. As usual, she’s in jeans and a black T-shirt. Mia doesn’t do pastels. “I’ll take the laundry.”

Our mom laughs while our dad holds out his hand to Mia so they can shake on it. “Laundry for two weeks?”

“Agreed,” she says, and we all know it’ll be done. We may joke around and Mia might like to bend the rules and Sasha may like to fight, but if we give our word on something, it’s a done deal.

While our dad gets a drink from the fridge, our mom cups Mia's face and kisses her forehead. "Please don't pierce yourself again. I don't want you getting an infection and having your ears fall off."

Mia smiles and lets out a dramatic sigh. "Fine. I won't pierce my earlobes again on my own."

We all know Mia is very precise in her promises. All she's agreed to do is not add another hole in her earlobes, the rest of her body is fair game.

"Anywhere, Mia," our mom says. "I can't stand the thought of you shoving a needle through your lip or eyebrow. I realize piercings are in your blood," my mom says, giving our dad a pointed look. He smiles and winks at her. "But please wait a few more years. We promise that if you still want them when you turn eighteen, we'll drive you to have them done ourselves."

Mia considers it. "How about I won't pierce myself again, at all, anywhere, if you agree that you'll take me when I'm seventeen to get a nose ring?"

When our parents look to one another and hesitate, Mia adds, "Come on, it's just a nose ring, and I'll agree to wait until I'm seventeen."

I can tell our dad doesn't care, but he waits until our mom says, "Okay, I can agree to that," before he smiles and says, "Sounds good to me."

Satisfied, Mia goes back to eating her chips while I grab a yogurt from the fridge. Sasha finishes his coke, but before he can throw it away, our dad grabs his hand.

"Another fight?"

Our dad's eyes run over Sasha, looking for any signs that he might've gotten hurt. Sasha can't hide his smile when he says, "He's a couple years older than me and couldn't even get a punch in."

Before he can decide if he's mad or not, our dad asks, "Why'd you do it?"

Sasha shrugs. "The guy was a jerk. Niki was focused on his phone, not paying any attention, and the guy tripped him. Niki wanted to fight him, but I held him back. He's a good fighter, but this guy's a senior and outweighed Niki by a good fifty pounds. I knew I could take him, so I did."

Most dads would lecture about how fighting is wrong and how you should never do it unless it's an absolute last resort, but most dad's aren't Bratva bosses either. Our dad squeezes Sasha's shoulder and gives a soft

laugh. Family is everything, and there's no better reason to get your hands bloody than to do it protecting your younger cousin.

"Just be careful, son. You know that damn pretentious school doesn't allow bodyguards on the property, but they're always waiting close by, so you text them if you need them, and don't ever underestimate anyone in a fight."

"I know," Sasha says. "I remember everything you taught me, Dad."

Our dad can't help but give a proud grin.

"Wow, can you girls still breathe with all the testosterone in the room?" our mom asks us, waving her hand in the air like she's trying to clear a path for some fresh oxygen.

Our dad laughs and walks over to her, easily picking her up and making her laugh as she wraps her arms around his neck. He whispers something in her ear that I'm glad I can't hear and then smacks her ass.

"Dad," I groan, rolling my eyes and sharing a grimace with my siblings. Our parents are very affectionate, and I really love that they're still so happily married, but that doesn't mean I want a front-row seat to everything.

"I love your mom," he tells us, "and I won't ever be able to act like I don't."

That's actually really damn sweet, and I can't even muster up a fake eye roll for him. I'd love to have what they have one day, but so far I've had zero luck in that department. The boys I went to high school with never did anything for me, and the only other guys I see are those in the Bratva, and there's just two problems with that—I don't want any of them, and even if I did, none of them are stupid enough to go against my dad and uncles. Aside from Mia and me, there are two female cousins. Yelena is seventeen and Svetlana is eighteen, and every man in the Bratva is under strict orders to keep things professional and not lay a hand on any of us unless our lives are in danger. My dad and uncles are fair men, but everyone knows that doesn't extend to where their daughters and nieces are concerned.

My dad kisses my mom again and then sets her down and looks over at us. "Let's order pizza tonight. Tomorrow we're going to the farmhouse for supper with everyone. Dominic's just flown in from Italy, so he'll be joining us."

I started calling the house out in the country that Uncle Danil bought for all of us the farmhouse when I was little. I'd just read a book about a little

girl on a farm, and every time we'd drive out to it to spend a weekend with our cousins and aunts and uncles, I thought of it as our farmhouse. There weren't any chickens or pigs or horses, but there's still acres of woods and a lake that's hidden in them. With all the wildlife and space, it felt like a farm to my young mind, and so the nickname just kind of stuck.

"Dominic's coming?" Sasha asks, already pulling out his phone to call his favorite pizza place for a delivery. "Is everything okay with his side of the city?"

"You're only sixteen," our mom reminds him. "Still way too young to be worried about business stuff."

Sasha looks to our dad, trying to get some help. "It's important I know these things."

"It's important you know *some* things," our dad says, "and all you need to know right now is that everything is fine and running as it should be. We invited Dominic because we haven't seen him in over a year, and we need to get caught up on a few things."

I know that one day Sasha and all our male cousins will be taking over for our dads, and I'm still not sure how I feel about that. I don't want my brother getting hurt, but I think I'm more afraid that stepping into this role is going to unleash a dark side of him that might be better off contained.

"It's important I know these things, too," Mia cuts in.

Our mom barks out a laugh before she can stop herself while my dad looks at his youngest like she's lost her damn mind.

"And why is that?" he asks

"For when it's my turn to join the family business." She gives a small shrug like it's a no-brainer while our dad softly shakes his head at her.

"Not going to happen, little witch. The Bratva is for men."

Mia scoffs and tosses back another chip, the loud crunch making it clear she doesn't give a damn about any past rules because they clearly don't apply to her.

"Jesus," our dad groans and then points at his full head of hair that's only just recently started to show some grey. "You see these? I don't want them to multiply, but I can tell you're not going to be satisfied until it's all white."

He looks to our mom for help, but she just laughs. "I'm sorry, I don't know anything about grey hair. I'm only thirty-nine."

“Oh, you’re in for it now, *malinkaya*,” he says, picking her up again while she laughs. “I can’t believe you’re all ganging up on me.”

“We would never,” our mom says. “If Mia gives you a full head of grey hair, then you’ll just be one hell of a silver fox.”

Our dad laughs and smacks her butt again. “Sasha, order the pizza. Your mom needs to eat. She’s obviously in need of calories and not thinking clearly if she’s talking about me being a silver fox anytime soon.”

Sasha laughs and shakes his head before making the call, just another typical night for us. Most of my nights are spent with my family. The private high school I just graduated from is the same one my siblings and cousins go to. We’ve grown up together, and instead of fighting and hating one another, they’re my best friends and I can’t imagine not having them in my life.

After the pizza gets here and we stuff ourselves while watching a movie, I head for bed, flopping down on my fuzzy, pink comforter before grabbing my phone so I can text Svetlana.

You’re going to the farmhouse tomorrow, right?

Her response is immediate. *Duh. Have you met my dad?*

I laugh because she’s right. Uncle Vitaly would never let her skip a family dinner. Before I can respond, she sends another text.

Want to go shopping tomorrow? I’ll pick up Yelena on the way and then we can just go from the mall to the farmhouse.

Sounds good, I tell her, already thinking about the new pair of shoes I want to get.

* * *

I’ve just finished helping Mia sort out some laundry, partly because I feel bad she has to do it but mainly because I don’t want her ruining my clothes, when I hear Svetlana knocking at our door.

“You sure you don’t want to come with us?” I ask Mia.

Her hazel eyes widen before she gives a soft laugh. “A day at the mall? I’ll pass.”

I laugh and leave her to the laundry before walking into the living room in time to see my dad wrap an arm around Svetlana’s shoulders and kiss the top of her head as he leads her into the kitchen.

“So you ladies are off to the mall?” he asks while grabbing us both a drink from the fridge. He always speaks to us in Russian. My mom speaks it pretty fluently now, and all the kids in the family grew up speaking and hearing it. It’s as familiar to me as English at this point.

He tosses Svetlana a bag of the gummy snacks she likes so much, smiling when she laughs and says, “Thanks, Uncle Lev.”

I see a lot of her twin brother, Valentin, in Svetlana’s face, but her honey-brown eyes are identical to her dad’s. I’m told she also has his ability to talk himself out of just about anything and his knack for being an all-around smartass. Apparently, my Uncle Vitaly was quite the handful when he was younger. Our parents are pretty tight-lipped about what all they got up to, but I’m guessing it was a lot.

“Yeah, we’re going to pick up Yelena and head to the mall. We’ll just drive to the farmhouse when we’re done,” I tell him. “Don’t worry, we’ll be there in plenty of time for supper.”

He’s already on his phone, texting a few of the guys to let them know where we’re headed. Bodyguards are just a daily part of life. We’ve all learned that there’s no escaping it, no matter how much we complain or, in Svetlana’s case, how many times we try to dodge them.

When he’s satisfied that we’ll be properly guarded, he smiles and gives me a hug. “Have fun, princess. Try not to max out the credit card.”

He laughs when he says it while I hug him back and say, “You know I’d never do that, even if Uncle Danil could just go in and erase it all.” I don’t add that our cousin Niki could do it just as easily, because I’m not sure if our parents are aware yet of how damn good he is. On more than one occasion he’s saved my ass by going in to change a few grades on my report card. I would’ve still graduated without his help, but he did save me from having to retake algebra my senior year.

My dad tells me he loves me and then pulls his niece in for a hug goodbye. “Drive safe, Sveta,” he tells her. “Sergei said you were speeding the other day again.”

Svetlana laughs. “You all keep way too close of an eye on us,” she tells him. “You know it’s not normal, right?”

My dad laughs. “Nothing about our family is normal. Surely you’ve picked up on that by now.”

Svetlana tilts her head and thinks for a second. “I might’ve picked up on that over the years.” She darts her brown eyes to mine. “Maybe it was when

they invited everyone from the Bratva to our dance recital when we were eight and Yelena was seven. Hmm,” she muses. “Yeah, I’m guessing that was the first clue.”

My dad laughs and points a finger at her. “A smartass, just like your dad, and it wasn’t the *entire* Bratva.”

Svetlana laughs and gives him another hug goodbye.

“We only did it because we were so damn proud of you three. We didn’t realize all the Russians with neck tattoos would draw so much attention.”

“I thought our dance teacher was going to have a heart attack,” I say, smiling at the memory of all that muscle lined up against the back wall, watching us perform the ballet routine that couldn’t have been all that good. The three of us loved our ballet classes, but I wouldn’t say any of us had a real talent for it. We were just excited about wearing the tutu and getting to jump around in front of our families. All the top Bratva members had stood there and smiled before giving us a huge round of applause when we’d curtsied at the end. The other parents hadn’t known what the hell to do. I still laugh when I think about it.

Before we can walk out the door, Sasha comes running up to us. “Hey, Sveta, mind if I ride with you guys? I promised Evgeny I’d come hang out.” He looks back at our dad. “Uncle Matvey said it was okay if I just ride with them tonight.”

“Sounds good,” our dad says, ruffling Sasha’s hair and then smiling when Sasha immediately smooths it back into place.

“Mia’s still working on the laundry,” I tell him as we head to the door. “I asked if she wanted to come, but she didn’t want to.”

He lets out a soft laugh. “Big surprise there. Don’t worry. I’ll let her punch the bag with me later.”

I smile and grab my purse because if there’s one thing Mia loves, it’s sparring with our dad in the home gym he set up. Why anyone would choose that over a day of shopping, I’ll never understand, but my sister’s her own person, and I respect the hell out of her for it. I pity the man she falls for because he’s going to need to be one tough son of a bitch to keep up with her. The thought of some man trying to tame her makes me laugh again as I kiss my dad’s cheek and follow my cousin and brother into the elevator.

On the way to Yelena’s, Svetlana tries to stick to the speed limit, but it doesn’t stop her from weaving in and out of traffic. The black SUV that’s

been following us since we left the parking garage doesn't have any problem keeping up, though. They're used to her driving by now. Plus, thanks to my dad, they know exactly where we're headed. All our families live close together, so within minutes we're pulling into the parking garage beneath the apartment building our Uncle Matvey and Aunt Alina live in.

While we walk to the elevators, I nudge Sasha with my shoulder. "You need anything from the mall?"

"Can you get me one of those soft pretzels?"

"That's what you want me to bring back for you?"

He shrugs. "I buy all my shit online. You know that."

"It's not the same thing as actually going to the mall and getting to see everything and try things on," I tell him. We've had this conversation a lot over the years. He just doesn't get it. "Fine, I'll get you the damn pretzel."

He smiles and pats the top of my head, a move he's been doing since he hit a growth spurt when he was fourteen and shot up taller than me. "Thanks, sis."

When we get out of the elevator and walk to the door, it opens before we can even knock, surprising no one. Our parents keep constant tabs on us, and when I see my Aunt Alina's smiling face, I can't help but understand their worry. I don't know all the details, but I know enough to know that our aunt was kidnapped by a really nasty sex-trafficking ring and held for two years. From what my mom said, it nearly destroyed my dad and uncles, but no one took it as hard as our Uncle Matvey. They finally managed to get our aunt back, but they all swore that nothing like that would ever happen to our family again, hence the constant texting between our parents and the ever-present bodyguards.

"Hey, Aunt Alina," I say, giving her a big hug. My aunt is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and she's also the most down to earth. Today, her dark hair is pulled back into a loose ponytail, she's wearing jeans and an old T-shirt, and she still looks like she should be on the cover of something. When our uncle walks into the room, her blue-green eyes immediately find his before her face lights up in a smile. Uncle Matvey was in a fire when he was fifteen, and it left him with a scarred body and a rough-sounding voice, but even though he can look intimidating, he turns into such a giant softie with Aunt Alina.

Uncle Matvey walks over and wraps an arm around his wife and kisses her head before smiling over at us. Sasha's already said a quick hello and

run off to find Evgeny, and Svetlana is squatting down and petting their German Shepherd Rasputin.

“Raspy’s a good boy,” Svetlana says, laughing when he licks her cheek. Yelena had named him when she was younger and obsessed with the cartoon *Anastasia*. We’d all cried like a baby when Finn, their first dog, had died, but he’d lived a good life, and he’d been surrounded by his family when he took his last breath. His ashes have a special place on one of our aunt’s shelves, right next to a photo of her and Uncle Matvey on the day they’d gotten him.

I bend down to pet his big head and scratch behind his ears while Uncle Matvey says, “So, another mall trip, huh? Aren’t you girls tired of that place by now?”

I laugh and look up at him. “Uncle Matvey, that’s not possible.”

Svetlana smiles up at him and says, “We’d love to check out some new places. Think our dads would be okay with us hitting a nightclub later?”

Aunt Alina laughs while Uncle Matvey groans and shakes his head. “I know you’re teasing me, Sveta. You’re so much like your dad it’s scary.”

She gives Rasputin one last pet and stands back up. “Speaking of my dad, he wanted me to tell you that he’s been practicing his pool game, and he’s pretty sure he’s taking you down later. He and Val are planning on challenging you, so come prepared.”

Uncle Matvey laughs. “He’s never going to beat me, but it’s so much fun to watch him try.”

Yelena comes into the room, tossing her phone in the oversized bag she has slung over her shoulder. Her eyes are just as dark as her dad’s, but her laid-back attitude is all her mom. While she asks her mom if she needs anything, my eyes stray to one of the framed photos on their wall. It’s my favorite one. My dad and all my uncles are twenty-four in it, and my Aunt Alina is seventeen. She’s standing next to Matvey, looking up at him with a big smile on her face while everyone else is smiling at the camera. She’s been in love with him her whole life, and I think it’s the sweetest thing ever.

“I could never seem to take my eyes off him,” she says, coming to stand next to me. She gives a soft laugh and points her finger at my dad. “Your dad had just gotten back from a fight. You can see his bloody knuckles if you look close enough.”

“They’re just like Sasha’s,” I mutter, shaking my head. “He’s fighting more and more.”

“He’ll be okay.” I turn to see my Uncle Matvey wrap an arm around his wife as he smiles over at me. “He’s a lot like his dad. He’ll get a handle on his rage, but until then, I’m guessing he can hold his own with the high school kids. Plus, that little shit deserved it for picking on Niki.”

I smile because he’s not wrong.

“You know, your Uncle Danil was picked on a little bit at school.” Uncle Matvey’s dark eyes are filled with amusement when he adds, “Until your dad taught him how to fight.”

I’ve heard stories about how good of a fighter my dad is, how he used to do a lot of underground fighting and that’s how he met my mom. Apparently, she was a big fan and stalked him a little bit. I can’t picture my mom doing that, but I think there’s a lot about my parents I don’t know.

“You guys ready?” Yelena asks.

“Heck yeah,” Svetlana quickly says. “We need to get going because this one,” she says, pointing a finger at me, “takes forever to decide on anything.”

“I’m not that bad. Besides, I’m only looking at shoes today.”

“Good god,” Svetlana groans, looking at our aunt and uncle. “This could take days.”

They laugh and then hug Yelena goodbye.

“You have your phone, right?” Uncle Matvey asks her.

Yelena reaches into her bag and pulls it out so he can see. “We’ll be safe, Dad. I promise.”

He still looks like he doesn’t want to let her out the door, but instead of giving in to that fear, he kisses her head again and tells her he loves her before wrapping his arms around Aunt Alina and looking at the three of us.

“Be careful. Keep your phones on and text if you need anything at all. Sergei, Aleksandr, and Feliks are watching you today. Let them know if anyone makes you uncomfortable.”

“We will, Dad. Don’t worry,” Yelena tells him, giving him another hug. She’s always been extremely close to him, and where most daughters would get annoyed with how overprotective he can be, Yelena’s always understood it and never once tried to make him feel bad about it. “I’ll even bring you one of those cinnamon pretzels you like so much.”

“Thanks, honey. Make sure you get your Uncle Vitaly one, too. You’ll never hear the end of it if you don’t.”

“Better just get enough for all of them,” Aunt Alina says with a laugh. “They can munch on them while they grill our supper.”

“Good thinking, *malishka*,” he tells her, kissing her head.

After promising to bring back more than enough pretzels for everyone, we finally leave the apartment and step into the elevator.

“Okay, I wanted to wait until we were all together before I said anything, but guess what I heard,” Svetlana says as soon as the doors shut. Before giving us a chance to guess, she smiles and I swear her honey-colored eyes sparkle with mischief. “Dominic Alessi just bought *La Dolce Vita*.”

“What?” I quickly ask, thinking of the nightclub that I’ve thought about trying to sneak into on more than one occasion. The Bratva owns a few strip clubs, but they don’t own any place that I’d want to hang out at, and even if I wanted to, our asses would get caught the second we walked through the door.

“You have to be twenty-one to get in,” Yelena reminds us.

Svetlana raises her brows at me and gives a soft laugh before walking out of the elevator when the doors open. “Dominic’s going to be at supper tonight. Maybe we can convince him to let us into his nice club.”

I laugh and shake my head, following her to her car. “You’re out of your mind, Sveta. We haven’t seen Dominic in years, and I doubt he even remembers us. Plus, there’s no way in hell he’s going to go against our dads and let us sneak into his club.”

“Maybe he will.” Svetlana gets in the driver’s side and looks over at me when I sit down in the passenger seat. “I mean, your dad did shoot him.”

“Yeah, and then Dominic saved his life,” I say, because we’ve all heard our parents teasing my dad about it.

Svetlana ignores me and looks back at Yelena. “What do you say? Are you in?”

Yelena laughs and shakes her head. “No way. Sorry, guys, but I can’t do that to my dad.”

I smile back at her, letting her know we’re not mad that she wants to sit this one out. “I’m pretty sure this is doomed to fail anyway,” I tell her.

She looks between me and Svetlana. “Please don’t do anything stupid.”

“No promises,” Svetlana says and then turns the radio up so she can sing along. She’s equally loud and off-key, and Yelena and I can’t help but bust out laughing.

We spend the next few hours at the mall. Most of the time is spent on me trying to find the perfect pair of shoes, but when I see them, I know every second of the hunt was worth it. They're the exact same shade of pink as my dress, and they have the cutest straps that wrap around my ankles.

"Oh my god, please tell me you're finished," Svetlana groans from the chair she's lounging in. Yelena's on her phone, but her lips quirk up at Svetlana's tone.

"Yes, I'm done," I tell her. "But you have to admit the wait was worth it. Look at these things."

They both look over. Svetlana nudges Yelena's shoulder. "Are you at all surprised that her toes are already painted the exact same shade of pink as her dress and shoes? Because I'm not."

"I think they look amazing," Yelena says. "And no, I'm not at all surprised."

"I like pink," I say in my own defense. I shove the shoes I've been wearing in my bag because I plan on wearing these for the rest of the day, and then walk over to pay for my new favorite shoes.

We spend another hour looking around. I grab a shirt I think Sasha will like, and then pick out a pair of earrings for Mia with little witch faces on them that I know she'll love while Svetlana and Yelena each grab a few things. Before we leave, we place a huge soft pretzel order, and when we head back to the parking garage, I wave Aleksandr over, handing him three of the pretzels. He immediately tries to wave them away.

"Please take them," I tell him. "We got extra for you guys. It can't be all that much fun following us around the mall all day."

"It's fine," he quickly tells me like this is the most exciting job ever.

I laugh and insist he take the pretzels. "You can still tail us to the farmhouse while you eat them."

He gives a soft laugh and finally takes them from me. "Thanks, Natalya. Appreciate it."

I smile at the man who's been watching over me and my cousins since I was born. His wife, Anya, used to dance at Pink, one of the strip clubs the Bratva owns, but she quit after she started dating Aleksandr. They've been married for almost fifteen years now and have three kids.

"Tell your family I said hi," I say and then walk over to get in Svetlana's car.

"Will do," he hollers out to me. "Thanks again for the pretzels."

We wave at them as they get in their black SUV before following us out of the garage. We've got an hour-long drive, and we munch on our own cinnamon pretzels on the way. By the time Svetlana is pulling onto the long, gravel road, we've come up with a plan of sorts. Svetlana and Yelena are going to run interference so that I can approach Dominic and ask him for a miracle. I don't remember much about him—just a man with a light beard, an expensive suit, and an aura about him that makes it clear he likes his space. I'm fairly confident he's going to laugh off my request. I'm just hoping like hell laughing is the only thing he does. The last thing I want is my dad and uncles knowing what we're up to.

When Svetlana parks next to a stunning, red Lamborghini, my heart speeds up and my throat goes dry, because the man getting out of it is not at all the Dominic I remember. This man is stunningly gorgeous, a few days' worth of stubble on his face, and wearing a suit that was obviously tailored specifically for him. It accentuates his broad shoulders and trim waist, and when he turns his head towards our car, his eyes are hidden behind dark sunglasses, and I'm suddenly not feeling all that confident about our plan.

"Damn," Svetlana mutters, giving a soft laugh. "Does he have any sons?"

I laugh, but the last thing on my mind is any possible sons he may or may not have. I'm too busy running my eyes over the older man who should most definitely not have caught my attention, but he has, and I can't seem to look away.

Chapter 3

Dominic

I watch the black Mercedes that's parked next to me. The driver gets out, and as soon as I meet her whiskey-brown eyes, I know I'm looking at Vitaly's daughter. A dark-eyed girl steps out from the backseat, reminding me so much of Matvey and Alina that I know it must be Yelena. I'm just about to say hi when the passenger door opens and my breath catches in my throat. The first thing I see is a tan, bare leg in the sexiest pair of goddamn heels I've ever seen. My eyes travel up her legs, catching sight of the matching pink dress she's wearing and the curves that are impossible for me to ignore, until finally reaching her face when she stands up. Her long, dark hair is loose around her shoulders, and when her eyes meet mine, they're the same pale shade of blue as Lev's.

Fuck me. It's *principessa*.

She steps around the door, and since her arms are filled with bags, she uses her hip to push the door shut behind her. Forcing my eyes off her, I take a breath and step closer. I'm carrying a bag of cannoli, but I reach out so I can help before she drops the bags of pretzels. When I grab a few, my fingers lightly brush hers, and I notice the blush that heats up her cheeks. She has a tiny bit of cinnamon sugar on her bottom lip, and all my instincts are screaming at me to lean forward and lick it off.

I don't know what the fuck has gotten into me, but fantasizing about an eighteen-year-old is not something I've ever done before.

Wanting to get my mind out of the damn gutter, I say, "Let me guess, these are for your Uncle Vitaly."

Her lips part in surprise before she lets out a soft laugh. "Well, they're for everyone, but, yeah, they're mainly for him."

“He made me bring him cannoli from Italy.” I hold up the bag. “This has been a pain in the ass to carry around, so he better damn well eat all of it.”

“You know he will.”

I turn to see his daughter staring at me with a big smile on her face. God, she’s got his shit-eating grin and his eyes.

“Long time, no see, Dominic,” she says with a laugh. “You remember me?”

“Of course, Svetlana, but even if I didn’t, you have your dad’s eyes and smile.” I look over at Yelena. “You also have your dad’s eyes.”

She gives me a shy smile. “It’s nice to see you again.”

“You too, Yelena.”

My eyes meet Natalya’s again. “And Lev’s daughter, of course.” I briefly run my eyes over her dress, not allowing myself to think about how damn good she looks in it. “I see you still like pink.”

“I do,” she whispers, giving me a surprised look that I remembered such a small detail about her.

“Hey,” Svetlana says, giving me the same wicked grin I’ve seen on her dad’s face more times than I can count. I know I’m probably not going to like whatever’s about to come out of her mouth, but her words are cut off when I hear her dad’s voice hollering at us from the porch.

“Dominic! Get your Italian ass over here! I’m hungry!”

No one else would ever dare speak to me the way the Melnikov brothers do, and for some insane reason I put up with it. Maybe it’s because it’s the only time I ever feel like a normal person. They’ve never treated me like I’m the heir to the Alessi Mafia. They joke around with me and give me hell, and I like that, not that I’ll ever admit it to the grinning fucker who’s still waiting for me to bring him his damn food.

“We brought cinnamon pretzels too, Dad,” Svetlana yells to him, making him smile even bigger.

I help Natalya carry the bags to the large, wraparound porch, and as soon as I’m close enough, Vitaly laughs and pulls me in for a hug.

“It’s been too damn long, Dominic,” he says, and then pulls back and laughs even harder. “Did you seriously wear an Armani suit to a cookout?”

“I did,” I say, handing him the bag I’ve carted across the fucking Atlantic for him. “Here’s your damn cannoli.”

He laughs and takes the bag, opening it and smelling the contents with a big smile on his face.

“How the hell are you still in shape?” I’ve known him for close to two decades now, and even though he has a bit of grey hair and a few lines around his eyes, the man is still as fit as the first time I saw him.

He laughs and pats his flat stomach. “It’s important to me that I look good naked for my wife.”

“Dad, gross,” Svetlana says, shaking her head at her father before taking the rest of the bags inside.

He laughs while we follow her into the large, white house. They call it the farmhouse, which immediately makes me think of something small and more on the simple side, but this is the exact opposite of that. The two-story house is huge with large windows that let in a ton of natural light and hardwood floors that are covered in decorative rugs. I can’t help but notice that Natalya stays by my side when we walk into a modern-looking kitchen where several women are busy preparing food.

“Dominic, so good to see you again!”

I smile at Alina and return the hug she gives me. We couldn’t get my sister back, but it’s always made me feel better knowing that at least she was saved.

“You look exactly the same,” I tell her, meaning every word of it. I pet the German Shepherd that’s standing by her side. “Who’s this guy?”

Alina smiles and pets his head. “This is Rasputin, but we all call him Raspy. Our daughter named him.” She laughs and looks at Yelena who’s taking a couple of the pretzels and disappearing down the hall.

“I was twelve!” Yelena hollers over her shoulder, making Alina laugh again.

I catch sight of Natalya’s pink dress as she walks further into the kitchen while I hug the other wives. The sound of several engines revving pulls my attention to the back window.

“Our husbands thought it would be a good idea to get the boys dirt bikes for Christmas one year,” Katya says, making it clear she didn’t think it was such a great idea.

“They didn’t get me one.”

I turn at the pissed-off tone and smile at the auburn-haired girl. She might look like Jolene, but this young girl is all Lev. She’s the exact opposite of her older sister. Instead of a pink dress and heels, she’s wearing

Doc Martins, a black pair of jeans, and a black T-shirt. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and I give a small smile when I see the skull earrings she's wearing.

"You get more like your father every time I see you, Mia," I tell her.

She smiles like it's the best compliment I could've ever given her and takes a big bite of her pretzel after dipping it into the icing.

"I bet your brother or one of your cousins will give you a ride if you ask," Jolene tells her. "And you know your dad promised you one when you get older."

"I don't know why I have to wait until I'm older to do anything fun," she mutters before grabbing another bite and then heading out the open French doors and onto the back deck.

I raise a brow at Jolene. "And here I was thinking Svetlana was going to be the handful."

Everyone laughs while Svetlana looks at me from across the kitchen. "I'm an absolute angel," she tells me with a straight face. "Always have been."

"And modest too," Vitaly says, coming up to stand next to his wife. He's already made his way through two cannoli and is working on a third.

Katya looks over at him. "Are you even going to be hungry for supper?"

He winks at her and takes another bite. "You'd think by now you would have learned to never doubt me, wife." He smacks her ass, and before she can say anything, he looks over at me. "Come on, the others are down by the grill."

Before I follow him out, I walk over to the counter, setting the bags I'm still carrying down. I briefly meet Natalya's eyes before forcing myself to look away. Her light blue eyes might look just like her dad's, but he's the last thing I'm thinking about when I stare into them. That girl is dangerous, and I need to stay the fuck away.

Taking the glass of whiskey Emily hands me with a smile, I follow Vitaly out of the house and onto the large back deck. We walk past several lounge chairs and a couple of hammocks and then down a few stairs to another level of the deck that's just as nice as the first one, but instead of potted flowers and lounge chairs, this one has the biggest damn grill I've ever seen and two hot tubs. The yard stretches out in front of us, revealing an in-ground pool and several acres of woods beyond that circle around the house. I see the trails the dirt bikes have made and hear the distant rumble

of their engines. It's beautiful out here and peaceful and I can see why they love it so much.

"Holy shit, man, it's good to see you."

I turn and smile at Lev. The first night I met Lev, it ended with him shooting me and our families forming an alliance to take down the Lebedev Bratva. The shot had been a nasty one, and my shoulder still aches from time to time. It doesn't surprise me at all that when he smacks my shoulder, he makes sure to hit the exact spot where the bullet went through.

"You are such a dick," I tell him, making him laugh. "I can't believe I saved your life after you shot me." I think about the night we rescued Alina. It had been chaos, and it was pure luck that I happened to look over at just the right moment to see the man aiming a gun at Lev. I'd yelled his name, and he'd ducked just in time.

"Oh, come on now. You would've never forgiven yourself if you'd just stood there and let me die."

I raise a brow at him. "I'm guessing I could've managed it."

He just laughs and smacks my back again. "Did you see the kids yet?"

"Yeah, I got here the same time as Natalya."

His eyebrow piercing glints in the sunlight when he raises it at me. "Did you notice she's not at all the spoiled princess you told me she'd become?"

I think about his beautiful daughter, the *principessa* that I can't seem to get out of my head and say, "Well, I didn't spend that much time with her. She could be a complete ass for all I know."

Danil barks out a laugh while Lev mutters something about Italians that I'm guessing isn't all that complimentary.

"Hey, Danil. How have you been?"

He smiles and takes another drink before saying, "I'm great, man. Sorry to hear about your dad."

"Thanks," I tell him, "but we all knew it was coming."

"So now you're officially the don," Roman says, coming to stand by us.

"I'm not kissing your fucking ring," Vitaly yells over his shoulder while he flips burgers on the grill.

I groan and look at Roman. "I keep telling him that's not how it works."

Roman shrugs. "He's stubborn. You'll never convince him."

"Stubborn's one way to put it." I take another drink and watch Matvey walk out of the house and over to us. He gives me an easy grin, the kind he would've never been able to manage before they got Alina back. He looks

happy, damn happy, and when he stands next to me and wraps his arm around my shoulder, giving me a side hug, I can't mask the surprise. I've seen him many times over the years, but this is the first time he's ever attempted physical contact.

"It's good to see you, Dominic." His voice is just as gravelly as ever, but that's the only thing that's the same. He's even wearing a T-shirt, not caring that his scarred, tattooed arms are easily visible.

"You're like a different man, Matvey." I raise my glass to him. "I'm happy for you."

He smiles even bigger and lifts his glass before taking a drink. At the sound of his daughter's voice, he looks over and shouts something in Russian. Yelena's walking with Valentin, both of them eating off the same pretzel while they walk towards the dirt bike that's parked outside the large barn at the back of the property. She smiles and hollers back at him before shaking her head and laughing.

"She hates wearing a helmet," Matvey explains, "but it's the only way I'll ever let her get on one of those damn things."

"Mia really wants one," I say, looking over at Lev.

Laughing he says, "Yeah, she only tells me that every damn day. She can get one when she's sixteen as long as I think she can handle it." He scrubs a hand over his jaw. "She also wants a motorcycle as soon as she gets her license, and we just compromised on piercings. She's agreed to not pierce herself any more, and in return we'll let her get her nose pierced when she's seventeen."

Vitaly laughs and points the spatula at Lev. "If she's anything like her dad, then that's not the only thing she's going to want to get pierced." To really emphasize his point, he lowers the spatula so it's pointing right at Lev's crotch.

"Fuck, brother," Lev groans. "Don't even say shit like that."

Vitaly just laughs and goes back to grilling.

"I'm so happy I have sons," Roman says while Danil laughs and raises his glass, clinking it against Roman's.

"A-fucking-men, brother."

I don't bother saying that I'm fucking thrilled I don't have either, because the men around me are obviously thrilled to be dads, and I don't want to piss on their daddy parade.

"What about you?"

I look over at Roman. "What about me?"

"You came here alone?" he asks. "You didn't bring anyone from Italy."

"I did, actually," I say, surprising them. "Two of my cousins. Dario and Alessandro will be staying with me in America."

Vitaly walks over after putting more hamburgers on the grill and says, "Yeah, I think he meant did you bring anyone over who doesn't have a dick."

"Is that what he meant?" I ask. "I hadn't picked up on that, Vitaly, thank you."

Vitaly laughs. "We've missed having you around, Dominic. We need a grumpy bachelor around to even things out. We all noticed how you kept yourself scarce when all our kids were at the babysitting age."

"Fuck yeah I did." I shake my head at the thought of dirty diapers and screaming babies. "That was absolutely on purpose."

"Like we'd ever trust you to watch our kids," Lev says, reaching for his phone and swiping his finger over the screen until he finds what he's looking for. "You look scared to death. You remember this? This is not the face of a man who I would trust to take care of my daughter."

I look at the photo. It's from Matvey and Alina's wedding. Lev had put his daughter in my arms, and I hadn't known what in the fuck to do with her. In the picture, Natalya is dressed all in pink with her back pressed against my chest and my hands wrapped snugly around her stomach and butt because I was terrified I was going to drop her. Lev's wrong, though. I don't look terrified in the photo. She's gripping my finger and looking up at me, and I'm looking down at her. I look puzzled and slightly surprised, if anything. I'd expected Natalya to scream, but she'd just smiled up at me like there was nowhere else she'd rather be.

When I look away from the photo, the first thing I see is Natalya staring at me. The same blue eyes meet mine, but everything else has changed about her. She's not a little girl anymore. She's a woman, a beautiful woman, but she's also completely and absolutely off-limits.

"Hey, princess," Lev says, waving her closer. "We were just talking about you."

She comes to stand by her dad, smiling when he shows her the picture of us. "Oh my god, I forgot all about that photo."

"You're the first baby he ever held," Lev says. "Can you tell?"

Her blue eyes study the picture, a soft smile playing at her full lips, and I can't help but notice that her top lip is slightly bigger than her bottom one, and fuck do I like that. She's wearing some sort of pink, glossy lipstick that's putting all kinds of inappropriate images in my head. The last thing I want to be thinking about while standing next to her dad is how goddamn beautiful those lips would look stretched around my cock.

"I think he looks pretty relaxed," Natalya says, giving me a quick smile. She swipes her finger over the screen, spending a few seconds doing something I can't see before handing the phone back to her dad.

Lev takes it, slipping it into his back pocket while saying, "He thought you were going to end up spoiled rotten." He wraps an arm around her shoulders and kisses the top of her head. He has to lean down quite a bit to do it, because even though she's still wearing those fucking amazing heels, she's still a good foot shorter than all of us. "Jokes on him, princess, because you're an absolute sweetheart."

"There's no way any of you would've let me grow up to be a brat." She laughs and looks at her dad and uncles. "Besides, all any of you had to do was look at me like you were disappointed and I'd burst into tears."

Vitaly gives a big smile. "Remember the time you and Yelena spent the night and my wicked daughter convinced you both to watch a scary movie that she knew she wasn't allowed to see?"

Natalya groans at the memory. Her uncles laugh while Lev looks at me and takes over. "A jump scare made Natalya scream, scaring the hell out of Vitaly. He came running in the room to find three terrified girls and Val, who'd been trying to calm them down, but it obviously wasn't working."

"As soon as she saw my face," Vitaly says, cutting in to finish the story, "Natalya started crying. She jumped in my arms, still shaking from that goddamn movie, telling me she was sorry. God, the three of them had to sleep with nightlights for like a month after that."

"It was a really scary movie," Natalya says in her own defense, "and we were ten."

"Yeah, that's why we said you couldn't watch it," Vitaly tells her. "Poor Val had his hands full trying to keep you girls out of trouble."

"Yeah, my brother's such a saint."

We all turn to see Svetlana walking over, a coke in one hand and a cannolo in the other, looking every bit like Vitaly's daughter.

Looking over at me, she smiles and raises the cannolo higher. “These are delicious. Maybe I should move to Italy.”

Vitaly points the spatula he’s still holding at her. “Don’t you dare. I will fly over there and personally drag your Russian ass back here.”

“I was born in America,” she reminds him.

“I’m Russian. Your mom is Russian. You, sweetheart, are Russian. I don’t give a damn what country you were born in.”

Svetlana laughs, clearly enjoying riling her dad up. She takes another bite right as the sound of revving motors grows louder and several dirt bikes emerge from the path in the woods. They’re all wearing dirt bike helmets, so I’m not sure who is who, but Yelena is clutched around, I’m assuming, Val, and there’s a much smaller body on the back of one of the other bikes, so Mia must’ve slipped out to join them at some point. When she pulls her helmet off, there’s a huge smile on her face. She’s an adrenaline junkie in the making, and I can only imagine the shit she’s going to get up to when she’s older.

As if sensing my thoughts, Lev sighs from beside me. “I was kind of hoping she’d outgrow her love of danger, but it just keeps getting worse.”

I look over and laugh. “Just wait until she starts bringing guys home.”

The look he gives me makes me give another laugh. “My daughter is never going to bring guys home, not unless she wants me to shoot them.”

I smack his shoulder and finish my drink. “You can’t just go around shooting everyone who pisses you off. You have to learn to use your words, Lev.”

Before he walks off to join Jolene, who’s just stepped outside with the other wives, he says, “Perks of running a Bratva. Yes, I fucking can.”

I smile because he’s not wrong. We spend the next couple of hours eating and catching up. Their family is loud and boisterous and I end up laughing more than I have in a very long time. By the time dessert is done, my jacket is off, the sleeves of my white, button-up are rolled to my elbows, and I’m forcing myself to switch to coffee because I’ve had way too much to fucking drink.

Roman whispers something in Emily’s ear before kissing her cheek and then giving her ass a soft pat when she stands up from his lap. She cups his face and smiles at him like she’s just as much in love with him as when I first met them. All the couples around me are that way. They’re constantly touching one another, sharing secret, heated looks, and whispering in each

other's ears. The kids aren't fazed by it, which tells me it's not at all out of the ordinary and just something they see every day. My family has always tended to be a little more closed off about our feelings, unless we're angry, then the whole fucking world knows it, but the sweet stuff? That's not something an Alessi man shows in front of others. It's seen as a sign of weakness, and appearing weak is a sin that's just one step below betraying your blood. Unforgivable.

Emily kisses Roman once more before grabbing her drink and heading inside. The rest of the women follow her lead and kiss their husbands before doing the same. Their daughters stand to join them, along with the younger boys. My eyes briefly meet Natalya's when she leans over the table to grab another water bottle. My eyes run down the curve of her neck, noticing the way a light blush hits her cheeks, and when our eyes meet again, her lips part ever so slightly, and it's enough to make my cock stir in my pants. The look only lasts a few seconds, but it feels so much longer before she turns her head and walks inside. I force myself to not stare at her retreating ass.

When I look back around the table, I see that Luka, Maxim, and Val are still sitting by their dads.

"They need to learn how things work," Roman says. "Do you mind?"

I look at the boys and give them a nod. "Not at all." I trust the men around me, and if they want their sons in on this, then it's fine by me. Bratvas may not be run in the same way mafias are, but we all know that loyalty and secrecy come above all else. I have no doubt that's been drilled into the three eighteen-year-olds who are watching us but smart enough to not say anything. They're here to learn, not participate.

Danil rests his forearms on the table and meets my eyes. "I know your men have been giving you updates, and for the most part things have been pretty damn peaceful. We've had some local gang shit, but nothing that wasn't easily squashed." He flicks the fingers of one hand out when he speaks, making it clear that getting rid of them didn't even qualify as a slight headache. "There have been a few attacks on our men in the southern part of our territory, though."

My brow raises in interest, waiting for him to go on, but it's Matvey who takes over.

"We think it might be another Bratva."

"What makes you say that?" I ask him.

He shrugs his shoulders and leans back in his chair. "Our men heard them speaking Russian. They were too organized and too well-equipped to be a local gang. This was someone coming in from the outside."

I take a drink and think about what he's said. "Any ideas on who it could be? My men tell me everything's been quiet on our side. Whoever it is, they haven't stepped foot on the east side yet."

"We don't know who it is yet," Danil tells me. "I'm working on it, but there weren't any security cameras in the area where the attack happened, and so far everything's quiet, no rumors about anyone new trying to move in."

I can hear the frustration in his voice, and I'm guessing he's spent a lot of hours on his computer trying to figure out who could be behind this.

"Let me know if you need anything from me," I tell them. "I'd like to continue working together now that I'm back on a more permanent basis. Dario and Alessandro will be handling my clubs, and I'll tell them to keep an ear out for any news. Anything you need from me, just let me know."

"Good to know," Roman says, giving me a grin. "It'd be a real pain in the ass to go to war with you."

"Tell me about it," I groan. "Who the fuck has time for that?"

Lev looks over at the young men who are silently taking in every detail of what's going on. "I hope you three appreciate how many people we had to kill to get to this point. Enjoy the peace we've bled for."

"Yeah," Vitaly says with a laugh, giving his son a smack on the back. "Don't fuck it up."

"We're not planning on it, Dad," Val tells him.

I can tell it's lesson time, so I take another drink of coffee and sit back to listen. Roman watches his own son. Luka looks so much like his dad, right down to the stern expression on his face, like he's already carrying the weight of his family on his shoulders.

"Never start shit if you don't have to," Roman tells him. "Don't ever start a fight unless you're absolutely certain you can not only win, but also decimate the other side, because any survivors are going to be threats that you're going to always be worrying about."

Luka nods his head, taking in everything his dad is telling him while the other two listen in just as hard. Max scrubs a hand over his face, reminding me that Danil once told me he was a gifted pianist. His long fingers look like they should be playing intricate pieces of music instead of holding

weapons and taking lives, but we don't always get to choose our path in life. I almost start to feel sorry for him until I see the look in his grey eyes. He's hungry for this, just as much as his dad and uncles and the two cousins beside him. He may have another side to him, a softer, gentler side, but that's not all that's living inside him. Val, on the other hand, is a little harder to read. He's quieter than I expected, considering who his dad is, but I get the feeling that not much gets by him.

Vitaly grins. "Don't start shit you can't finish, but," he says, drawing the word out, "if someone fucks with your family or tries to encroach on your territory, then you have to do whatever it takes to send a message."

"And sometimes that message is very bloody," Lev says, making his brothers give a few soft laughs.

The boys smile, already impatient and anxious to make their own mark on the Bratva they've been born into. We talk for several more minutes. They fill me in on the new clubs they've opened. Pink, the strip club that Vitaly turned into one of the most respected gentleman clubs in the city is still bringing in a hefty profit every month, but they've also branched out and opened up a couple of nightclubs, one of them near the city's most prestigious university, hoping to draw the rich students in.

"Like moths to a fucking flame," Vitaly says. "Those rich kids can't spend their parents' money fast enough."

"You selling there?" I ask.

Roman answers for him. "A little, but it's never going to be our main source of income. We've got a few guys supplying pills. The nightclub makes it easy. We always have sellers there on the weekends. The students pay a cover charge, buy overpriced drinks, and then spend a small fortune on pills that will help them forget about their stressful classes for a few hours or help them stay up all night to study for them."

"And there's Lev's thing," Vitaly says with a grin.

"How is the underground fighting business going?" I ask, giving a soft laugh. "You started something huge all those years ago when you took Sebastian out."

His lip ring moves as he gives me a big smile. "Paying to fuck and paying to watch a fight—I'm guessing those have both been lucrative businesses since the first currency system was put into place."

"True enough," I agree, "especially when they know it's a fight to the death. People are so damn predictable. Violence, sex, and money, it always

draws a crowd.”

“Speaking of,” Matvey says, “what are your plans with *La Dolce Vita*?”

“I’m keeping the main nightclub area, but I’m going to add a second floor. It’ll have very restricted access to only a select few.”

“What the hell is going to be going on up there?” Vitaly asks with a soft laugh.

“Gambling. High-stakes only.”

He grins at me and nods his head. “Fucking nice, man. That’ll bring in some good money.”

“It will,” I agree. The Alessi family has always been involved in real-estate in this city. That’s what we’re known for, and that’s what we use to hide our money, but I’ve been wanting to branch out for years, and now feels like the right time. I bought the nightclub under an LLC, making sure my name is completely hidden from everything, and the plan is for the upper level to be private and word-of-mouth only. I want to appeal to the men who have money to spend and don’t know when to quit and walk away from the table. Too much money and zero self-control, that’s the crowd I’m looking for, and I have no doubt I’ll find it.

After a few more minutes of small talk, I tell them to let me know if any more attacks take place and that I’ll inform my men of what’s going on and tell them to keep an eye out for anything suspicious. When Luka stands up, I notice the large tattoo on his left, inner forearm.

“May I?” I ask, motioning for him to hold his arm out.

He smiles and leans closer, giving me a better look at it. It’s an image of the Grim Reaper, and it stretches from the crook of his inner elbow all the way down to his wrist. The cloaked skeletal figure is wearing a black robe, the hood tilted back so the wicked grin he’s giving is visible. The scythe he’s carrying is dripping bright-red blood, the only spot of color on the entire tattoo, making it stand out even more. There’s a black raven perched on his shoulder with its head cocked to the side like it’s studying me, and beneath the whole thing is a sentence in Russian.

“What does it say?”

“Brothers in blood, in life, and in death,” Luka says. I hear the pride in his voice when he speaks the words. None of the kids have accents, but I know they all speak Russian fluently.

“Svetlana designed it,” Vitaly says with a proud grin. “It’s based on a tattoo that Matvey has, but she tweaked it a bit. They wanted a tattoo that’s

all their own, and every male in the family will get it when they turn eighteen.”

I thank Luka for showing me and look over at Lev. “You know Mia’s going to want one.”

He sighs. “She’s already asking for it.”

His brothers laugh while we all stand to go in, knowing everyone else has waited long enough. I’m about to make my exit when Danil says, “Don’t even think about it. We’re about to play some pool. You have to at least stay long enough to get your ass kicked by Matvey.”

I relent and grab my coffee cup. “Maybe one game.”

When Svetlana sees us walking towards the French doors, she opens them and runs her eyes over us. “Come on, Dad. I’m stepping in for Val. I know we can beat Uncle Matvey and Aunt Alina this time.”

“Hell yes we are, sweetheart. Get ready to pose for some celebratory photos, because we’re documenting this win so we can constantly remind them of it.”

Svetlana laughs, but I notice the way she keeps looking over at me. I’m not sure what she’s up to, but when she goes out of her way to keep everyone distracted, leading them down the hall while Natalya slips out onto the deck with me, I’m more than a little curious. She turns her light blue eyes up at me and gives me a nervous smile. She must’ve recently reapplied her lip gloss, because her lips are glistening ever so slightly, and I have to force myself to not stare.

“What’s going on, Natalya?”

She meets my eyes and swipes her tongue over her bottom lip, making me nearly groan. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

“About?”

Turning her head, she looks in to make sure no one is watching and then takes a step closer. I raise a brow at her, waiting to see where this is going. She fidgets, shifting her weight from foot to foot and swiping at her dress in an effort to keep her hands busy.

“You might want to just say it,” I tell her. “I’m guessing someone is going to come looking for us in a few minutes.”

She gives another nervous glance towards the window. “I just,” she starts and then stops. Looking back up at me, her cheeks turn even pinker when she says, “I was wondering if you could get me and Svetlana into your new club.”

I let out a soft laugh. I've been propositioned by enough women to know that it wasn't what Natalya was doing when she cornered me on the back deck, but I hadn't been expecting this.

"You have to be twenty-one to get into *La Dolce Vita*," I remind her.

She looks up at me and huffs out a breath. "You're the owner. Surely you can bend the rules a little."

"Bend them for the Bratva *principessa* whose father and uncles are men I do business with and who would be furious if they knew I'd snuck their daughters into a nightclub?"

"We're not going to drink or do anything wrong." When she sees the disbelieving look on my face, she adds, "We're not. We just want to see it. In case you haven't noticed, our parents are a little strict."

"They're that way for a reason, and I think you know that."

"I do, but we're going stir crazy, and what better way to let off a little steam than while under the protection of one of their oldest friends?"

I laugh at the smile she gives me. It's a *pretty please* mixed with desperate hope, and it's fucking adorable. As beautiful as she looks under the moonlight begging me for something, there's no way in hell I can give her what she wants. I've already broken enough unwritten rules by thinking about her in a sexual way, and I'm not about to add to it by sneaking her underaged ass into my club behind her family's back.

"I'm sorry, but I can't help you."

She surprises me by gripping my arm when I turn to go inside. I look down at her small hand on my inked forearm, clenching my jaw at the sight of her pink nail polish against my skin, unable to not think about what her hand would look like wrapped around my dick, glimpses of feminine pink as she works me up and down in long, slow strokes.

Her skin is hot against mine, and when I lift my eyes to hers, her lips part in a soft gasp. Whatever she sees in my eyes has her releasing her hold on me and taking a step back.

Wise choice, principessa.

I look down at her, noticing the slight flush to her chest and the way her breathing has picked up the tiniest bit. I have no doubt that if I were to close the distance and lick my way along one of her pulse points, I'd find it racing beneath my tongue.

"I'm going to go inside and pretend you didn't just ask me this. I suggest you forget about this crazy idea. There are a lot of dangerous men

out there, *principessa*. It'd be best if you kept your ass inside where it's safe."

Without waiting for a reply, I turn and walk back inside, leaving her on the porch with a stunned look on her beautiful face and a pissed-off look in her eyes.

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Chapter 4

Natalya

I watch Dominic's broad shoulders disappear inside the house with my mouth still hanging open. I hadn't expected him to just smile and say, *well, okay there, sweetheart. I'll sneak you in no problem*, but I also hadn't expected him to dismiss the idea so quickly. I thought he might at least think about it for a few seconds, but it's obvious after talking to him that he was never going to entertain the idea of helping us.

I'm still staring into the house, even though he's long out of sight, remembering the way his skin had felt beneath my fingers. I hadn't meant to reach out to him. It had just happened, but once I'd felt the heat of his skin, I hadn't wanted to let go. He'd tensed when I'd touched him, but he hadn't pulled away. Instead, I'd been the one to let go when I'd met his eyes and seen what was behind them. He'd looked hungry, damn hungry, and I've never seen anything like it. I've had boys at school stare at me and I've gotten looks while out and about, but no one has ever looked at me the way Dominic just did—like he wanted to possess every damn inch of me, like he wanted to own me body and soul. I'd been so stunned I'd let go, but now I'm wishing I hadn't. It's stupid and pointless since he's way too old for me and working with my dad and uncles, but I can't help but be intrigued.

What would it feel like to be possessed by a man like Dominic? I have no idea, but I'd like to find out. With my head swimming with thoughts I shouldn't be thinking, I make my way back inside, following the sounds of laughter into the large room at the end of the hall. There's a couple of leather couches and chairs and a pool table that my family is currently standing around. My cousins are sprawled out on the couches, watching the game. Svetlana's just finished her shot when her eyes meet mine. I give her

a small shake of my head to let her know the mission has failed. She frowns, but I have no doubt she's already coming up with a Plan B.

When I take a seat on the nearest couch and look around the room, my eyes meet Dominic's. He's standing on the other side of the room, one broad shoulder leaning against the wall, looking completely relaxed and sexy as hell. His tattooed forearms are still on full display, and I'd give just about anything to run my fingers over his olive skin again. His brown eyes linger on mine for longer than necessary before slowly turning his attention back to the pool game.

It's only after he's looked away that I realize I've been holding my breath. I'm used to dangerous men, I've been surrounded by them since birth, but there's something different about Dominic. He's an unfamiliar danger. I don't know what he's capable of, but I want to find out.

After Svetlana and Uncle Vitaly lose the game, she comes and sits next to me while my dad and Sasha step up to play next.

"No luck, huh?" She keeps her voice low so only I can hear.

"Nope," I say, nudging her shoulder with mine while I huff out a soft laugh. "He didn't even think about it."

"Plan B it is."

I look over and meet her honey-brown eyes, immediately comparing them to the much darker shade of Dominic's. "Do I even want to know what Plan B is?"

She laughs. "Probably not. Once I get the details all sorted out, I'll let you know. Just be ready to go next Saturday."

We sit back and watch our Uncle Matvey and Aunt Alina win every game of pool they play. We all know it's Uncle Matvey doing it, but the way he smiles at her every time she manages a good hit or sinks a ball, you'd think that she was the one carrying the game.

When they're undefeated, Dominic looks at his watch and smacks my dad on the shoulder. I'm too far away to hear what he's saying, but it's obvious he's leaving, and I'm surprised by how badly I don't want him to. I've enjoyed stealing glances at him all night, and I'm not ready for my eye candy to leave.

"He's old enough to be our dad," Svetlana whispers in my ear, reminding me of what I already know.

"Yeah, but he isn't," I whisper back.

She laughs and shakes her head. “You’re lucky I can keep a secret and that I love you so much.”

“There’s nothing to tell,” I remind her.

She just lets out another laugh and says, “Not yet there isn’t, but I saw the way he was looking at you. I think someone wants to taste some forbidden fruit.”

I bark out a laugh before I can stop it, and when I raise my eyes again, Dominic is staring at me, head tilted ever so slightly with one dark brow raised as he watches us with open curiosity. I swear the dark stubble on his face has gotten even thicker since he arrived, and my fingers itch to touch him, to feel the coarse hairs against my skin.

He turns away from me when Uncle Roman says something to him, and then a few minutes later, he’s saying a quick goodbye and giving a wave to my mom and aunts. Before he turns to leave the room, his eyes meet mine one last time, and then he’s gone.

“Maybe you should run out and tell him goodbye?”

Keeping my eyes on the empty doorway, I say, “That might draw a bit of attention, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, probably. They were already asking where you were when you were talking to him on the deck. I had to tell everyone you were making him more coffee. Our family is way too observant.”

It’s a common complaint between us, but we both know there’s no changing it. There are certain things our family isn’t going to budge on, and safety is one of them. Leaning down, I slip my new heels off and grab her hand.

“Come on, we need chocolate.”

She gives me one of her big smiles. “Now you’re speaking my language.”

When we step into the kitchen, Luka and Max are already raiding the cabinets, Val and Yelena are sharing a large bowl of ice cream, and Sasha is pulling out a bottle of root beer so he can make a float.

“Keep that out,” I tell him, already grabbing a couple of large glasses in case anyone else wants one.

Luka laughs at the amount of ice cream I scoop out and tosses a bag of marshmallows on the counter next to the graham crackers Max found.

“Rough night?” he teases, leaning against the counter next to me. He has a playful glint in his green eyes when he looks down at me. My cousins

are gorgeous, there's no denying it, and all the girls in school went crazy for them, but even though we're not related by blood, I've only ever thought of them as my cousins. They're my best friends, the guys I go to when I'm stressed or pissed off or just wanting to hang out and have a good laugh.

I grab one of the marshmallows while my other hand pours root beer over my ice cream. "Don't judge, Luka."

"I would never." He grabs a handful of marshmallows for himself and then takes the bottle of root beer from me so he can have a drink.

"So did you get all your Bratva talk done?" I stab a straw into my float and take a big drink, letting out an appreciative sigh. "God, that's good."

Max tosses a marshmallow at me, hitting me right between the eyes. He points a long finger at me. "You know he can't answer that."

I grin at him and eat the marshmallow he socked me with. "I know, but it's not going to stop me from trying."

"Seriously," Svetlana says, grabbing the last cannoli that her dad must've somehow missed. "We're not ever allowed to know anything?"

Luka grins. "Nope."

Svetlana turns her eyes to me and rolls them. "We don't get the cool tattoos, we don't get to carry guns or shoot anyone, and we don't get to know all the cool secrets. Being in a Bratva family is a lot less exciting than I thought it'd be."

Val laughs and hands Yelena the cherry from their sundae while Luka says, "Perks of having a dick."

Svetlana fakes a dry heave. "Gross. You do know what year it is, right? You can get rid of the loin cloth and drop the club from your hand."

He just shrugs and takes another drink. "That's just the way it is."

I finish my bite and ask, "But you guys are going to be taking over, right? Can't you just change the rules?"

"That's funny that you think our dads are going to just sit back and fully retire," Max says. "And no, just because we're stepping up and learning the family business doesn't mean we can just change everything." He raises a brow at me. "Or that we'd want to."

"The men in our family have always protected the women," Val says. Yelena sneaks him a quick smile before she takes another bite.

They've always been close, but you'd have to be blind to not notice that they don't look at each other like the rest of us do. So far our parents have

continued an admirable sort of stubborn denial to see anything, and the rest of us aren't about to burst their bubble.

"Maybe we don't need protecting," Svetlana counters.

That makes them all laugh.

"Are you kidding me?" Sasha says, joining in now that he's finished drinking his float. "Do you have any idea how many fights I got into because you pissed someone off at school?"

"Me?" Svetlana's feigned innocence has me snorting out a laugh.

"Yes, you." Sasha points his finger at her. "You like to piss people off, especially people who are way bigger and stronger than you."

Svetlana looks over at me. "Your brother's been hit in the head one too many times. He's clearly confusing me with someone else."

When my brother just shakes his head at her, she gets up and walks over to him, wrapping her arms around him in a big hug. Svetlana's taller than me, but he still towers over her.

"I'm sorry, cuz. Thanks for watching out for me."

"It's a full-time job," he mutters.

"Ain't that the truth," she says, not even bothering to deny it.

He laughs and kisses the top of her head. "Now that you've graduated, maybe my knuckles won't be bloody all the time."

"Yeah right. We all know you love to fight."

This time it's his turn to not bother denying it. "Like father, like son, I guess."

We don't leave the kitchen until we're all so stuffed we can barely move, and then it's only so we can go change into pajamas and meet back up in the room that we converted into our own mini movie theater. Our other cousins eventually join us. Damien, Luka's little brother comes in, taking a seat next to Evgeny and Sasha on one of the couches while everyone else sprawls out on either the leather recliners or the giant beanbags. Svetlana and I share one of the extra large beanbags while Yelena and Val take the one next to us. We pull a few buttery-soft blankets over us while Luka scrolls through the movie options.

Once the movie starts, my mind drifts to Dominic. I'm curious about him, way more than I should be, but no matter how hard I try to focus on the movie and shove him out of my mind, he keeps coming back. I swear I can still feel the heat of his skin beneath my fingertips and smell the spicy,

woody, panty-melting scent of his cologne that's best described as *sexy as fuck*.

I finally drift off to sleep at some point during the second movie, but when I wake, I'm still haunted by thoughts of Dominic, and the next week is one of the longest of my life. Svetlana has been tight-lipped about her plans, and the only hint she gives me is on Saturday morning when she sends me a simple text.

Tell your parents you want to sleep at the farmhouse tonight with me. Val, Luka, and Max are staying out there. We can hang out and watch girly movies upstairs.

I know she has more planned than just a movie marathon, but I also know the less I know the better. I don't want to lie to my parents. I've never had to before, and it makes me feel guilty just thinking about it. Before I lose my nerve, I find my mom in the kitchen. She's chopping vegetables, so I grab an extra cutting board and several of the carrots she's working on.

"Thanks, honey. These things are taking me forever."

I smile over at her before I start cutting. "Hey, Mom, do you mind if I stay over at the farmhouse tonight. Sveta and Val are going over there with Max and Luka."

Even though I'm eighteen, there's no way in hell I'm going to be given the freedom that other adults have. Our world is just too dangerous for that. My mom thinks while she tosses all the cut-up carrots into the slow cooker with the roast.

"I don't see why not. Your dad is out with your uncles, but I can send a text to Grigori and Feliks. They can stay in one of the guest rooms."

"Mom, that's really not necessary."

She raises a brow at me. "I'm going to stop you right there so you don't waste any more seconds of your precious life. You know this is nonnegotiable and that your dad will drive out there himself if he finds out I let you two go without any bodyguards."

I know she's right, and there's no way in hell I want my dad driving out there, so I quickly say, "Okay. I just feel bad that they have to follow us around all the time. They must get so sick of it."

My mom smiles at me and shakes her head. "They get paid a lot of money to watch over you all, and they know what an honor it is. Your dad and uncles would never trust an idiot to watch over you guys."

I smile back at her, but I can't help wishing we did have a couple of dumbasses watching over us tonight. I still have no idea what Svetlana is planning or how she thinks we're going to get past two well-trained Bratva members and three of our male cousins, and I don't want to. I'm more than happy to go into this blind, because I'm guessing the truth of what we're about to do would scare me into keeping my ass inside tonight. You can't fear what you don't know, right?

After helping my mom cut up a few more vegetables, I give her a hug and then go to pack my bag. At the last minute, I throw in a sequined dress in a light shade of pink that I bought on a whim but have yet to work up the courage to wear. It's way tinier than anything I'd usually pick out, but I love the way it sparkles, and the new pink heels I bought last week will go perfectly with it.

Satisfied I have everything I might need, I text Svetlana to let her know I'm ready, and less than twenty minutes later she's knocking at our door.

"Hey, Aunt Jolene." She gives my mom a big smile and grabs a banana from the counter. She's cool as a cucumber, whereas I'm pretty sure I'm visibly sweating through my shirt. She gives me a *chill the fuck out* look as she pulls the peel down and takes a big bite. I try like hell to keep calm, but I must be doing a piss-poor job of it because as soon as she's tossed the peel in the garbage, she says, "Well, we better get going. I told Val we'd be over there in an hour, and I don't want him worrying."

"You two have fun." My mom gives us both a hug and kisses our foreheads, telling us she loves us and to text when we get there.

"I will. Love you too," I tell her, hoping we don't get caught tonight, because I'm not so sure I'll be able to bear the disappointed look my mom will give me if this plan fails. Turning to Svetlana, I sling my bag over my shoulder and follow her out before I lose my nerve. My desire to follow the rules is strong, but my desire to possibly catch another glimpse of Dominic is stronger, and there's no use denying it.

As soon as we're in the elevator, Svetlana sighs and leans against the wall. "Tell me you packed something slutty to wear."

I can't help but laugh when I meet her eyes. "I packed the pink, sequined dress." There's no need to elaborate. She knows exactly what I'm talking about because she was there when I bought it, whispering in my ear that I had to get it like the little devil of temptation she very often is.

“Perfect.” Her brown eyes gleam with pure mischief when the elevator doors open and we step into the parking garage. Grigori and Feliks are already waiting in the black SUV that’s been a staple of my life. I can’t remember a time when I didn’t have one following me. We give them a wave and then get in Svetlana’s car.

“Are you going to tell me the plan?” I finally ask when we’re about twenty minutes into the drive.

She lets out a soft laugh. “No way in hell. We still need to act normal in front of Val and the others. If they get suspicious, we’re fucked. I love you, Natty girl, but we both know you have a terrible poker face.”

I laugh at the nickname and shake my head, but I don’t bother arguing. We both know she’s right. The rest of the drive is spent singing way too loudly and definitely off-key until she turns onto the gravel driveway and the large, white farmhouse comes into view. Our Aunt Emily is really into flower gardening, and the tulip beds she planted out front several years ago are in full bloom, making the place look even prettier than usual.

Svetlana parks next to her brother’s car. It’s a gorgeous Jaguar in the prettiest burnt orange color I’ve ever seen. Sleek and sexy are the two best words to describe it, and he treats it like his baby. Val’s always been more on the quiet side compared to the others, but get him started on his car, and he’ll never shut up.

I hear the distant sound of motors revving, and I let out a sigh of relief. If they’re out riding, then I won’t have to face them for a few hours. Grigori and Feliks pull in behind us, and it doesn’t escape my notice that they’ve blocked us in with their large vehicle. When I give a worried look to Svetlana, she just gives me a wink like it’s no big deal. Apparently whatever she has planned doesn’t include her car.

The two men follow us inside. They know the drill, so they make themselves at home. They’ll sleep in shifts tonight so one of them is always awake to watch the house and make sure everything is safe, but for now, they each grab a bottle of water and head for the back deck.

“We’ll be out here if you need us,” Feliks tells me on his way out.

“Okay. I’ll let you know when the pizza is ready. Mom stocked up on the sausage and pepperoni ones you guys like so much.”

He gives me a big smile. “Thanks, Natalya.” He pats his flat stomach. “I need to be careful about all the pizza you two feed me. My girlfriend is going to start complaining.”

I laugh because the man is built like he lives in the gym. “I really doubt that.”

“She puts up with my crazy hours, but I can’t ask her to tolerate crazy hours and love handles. She’ll be kicking me to the curb so fast it’ll make my head spin.”

“If you want to sneak off and spend the night with her, you can,” Svetlana tells him, giving him an innocent *I’m just trying to be helpful* look. “We won’t say a word.”

He laughs and looks back at Grigori. “Can you imagine what they’d do to me if I left?”

Grigori raises a dark brow. “I don’t need to imagine it. I’ve seen it, and so have you. Your girlfriend puts up with a lot, but I’m guessing she probably won’t stick around if you come home without a dick.”

“Jesus,” I groan. “They wouldn’t do that.” When both men hesitate, I add, “Would they?”

Instead of an answer, Grigori says, “We’ll be on the back deck if you need us.”

After they leave, I look at Svetlana. “We’re keeping our asses inside tonight,” I whisper.

“Like hell we are,” she whispers back.

“Our dads apparently cut off dicks when they’re angry, Sveta. I don’t want Feliks and Grigori getting in trouble. It’s not fair to them.”

She can tell I’m freaking out, so she comes to stand in front of me, grabbing my shoulders and forcing me to look at her. “They won’t get in trouble. I promise. I’ve got it all planned out, and even if we do get caught, I’ll make sure they know it isn’t their fault. I’ll take the blame for everything.”

“We’ll take the blame,” I say, because no way in hell would I let her fall on the sword all by herself. I may be terrified, but I’m not an ass. We go down, we go down together.

By the time the guys are racing out of the woods on their dirt bikes, the pizzas are cooling on the counter, and Svetlana and I have already filled our own plates. Grigori and Feliks join us, more than happy to eat supper and joke around with us. They feel like part of the family at this point, but we all know the nice, laid-back attitude they show us only extends so far. They have no problem telling us no if we try to do something that could

potentially get us hurt or that they feel is unsafe. At the end of the day, they work for and answer to our dads, and none of them take that lightly.

When everyone has eaten their weight in pizza and Feliks and Grigori go back outside, Val looks over at us. “So you two want to hang out with us? We’re going to be gaming all night.” He motions his hand towards his cousin. “Max is under the impression that he can beat my high score. I told him it’s not going to fucking happen, but you know how stubborn he is.” He wiggles his fingers and adds, “He thinks those piano hands of his can beat the superior dexterity of mine.”

Max looks at him and sighs. “Piano hands? Really?”

“I’m sure your hands are super dextrous, Val” Luka says with a laugh. “And we all know why.”

“Gross,” Svetlana growls, giving them both a disgusted look but still laughing while she does it.

I laugh at my family and hook my arm through Svetlana’s. “We’re going to pass on your manly gaming night.”

“Yeah,” Svetlana says, pulling me back towards the hall. “Besides, we’re both on our periods, so we’re going to just eat chocolate and watch girly movies.”

This time it’s the guys’ turn to groan while we laugh. Val points a finger at his sister. “Just because we’re twins doesn’t mean I need to know every damn thing.”

Luka laughs and grabs another coke from the fridge. “Go watch your movies and take your menstruating asses out of here.”

“You know we don’t menstruate out our asses right?” Svetlana turns to me. “Please tell me they at least know that.”

I’m laughing too hard to answer while Val groans and Luka looks at us like he has no idea what to do with us. Max fights a grin and leans back in his chair, crossing his arms across his broad chest. I swear my cousins get bigger every time I see them. They’re already as tall as our dads, and I’m guessing they’re going to pass them by in another couple of months.

Luka shakes his head with a laugh and changes course, steering us away from the menstruation topic. “We’re leaving after lunch if you want to follow us back.”

“Sure thing, cuz.”

He can’t help but smile at the over-the-top, sweet way Svetlana says it.

His green eyes meet mine. “Don’t let her corrupt you, Nat.”

“Too late,” Svetlana and Val say at the same time before she pulls me out of the room. I can still hear them laughing as we race up the stairs to the last bedroom, the one that’s furthest from everyone else and facing the woods on the left.

As soon as she shuts the door, she turns to face me. “Okay, we’ve got a couple of hours to kill, and then it’s showtime.”

“Showtime for what? Your car is blocked in, and we have three guys and two bodyguards to get past.”

“We don’t need the car, and we’re not going to sneak through the house. My period comment means the guys will be giving us a wide berth, and they’re going to be so caught up in their gaming that it won’t matter anyway. Grigori and Feliks will be staying downstairs like they always do. No one’s going to know we’re not in here watching movies.”

“How the hell are we going to get out?”

When her eyes dart to the window, I’m already shaking my head no before the words fall from my lips. “No way in hell, Sveta!”

“It’s perfectly fine.” Her voice is annoyingly calm. “Remember those rose trellises Uncle Roman put in for Aunt Emily?”

“No,” I quickly say, already thinking of all the bones we could break on the fall down.

“They’re very secure.” She says it like she knows all about landscaping and trellis strength and the amount of weight they can handle at any given time.

“Uh-uh,” I tell her, my eyes wide with disbelief. “Your plan is for us to just shimmy our asses down one of them?”

She completely ignores my tone and instead gives me a big, happy grin. “Exactly, and then we’re going to take a short walk through the woods, and when we come out onto the highway about half a mile from the house, an Uber will be waiting for us.”

“Jesus Christ, we’re going to die tonight, if not from breaking our necks, then from being eaten by a wild animal in the dark woods.”

“We’ll be fine. We’re taking one of the dirt bike trails. Plus, I brought a flashlight.” She says it like the flashlight is the deciding factor in why this plan is foolproof instead of doomed to miserably fail.

“Our dads are going to kill us.”

Her lips lift up in her famous smirk. “Only if they catch us.”

I groan and close my eyes. “Oh, they’re definitely catching us.”

She grabs my hand and the bags that she'd already tossed up here at some point and pulls me towards the bathroom. "I told you I'm bringing a flashlight," she mutters before shutting me in. "Take a shower," she hollers through the door. "Get yourself all cleaned up for you know who!"

I can hear her laugh growing softer, knowing she's probably already flopped down on the bed and grabbed the remote. Looking at myself in the mirror, I take a big breath and then get to it. I'm not going to admit that she's right, but she *is* right. If I do happen to run into Dominic tonight, I want to look and smell amazing. I want to knock him on his ass with one look.

Two hours later, we're both showered and dressed with our hair and makeup looking perfect. The dress is even smaller than I remember it being. I angle myself to the side, and peek over my shoulder at the mirror. The thin straps crisscross my bare back while the dress dips dangerously low. Good god, one wrong move, and I'm going to be showing crack.

"I don't know about this," I mutter.

"You look amazing, and we're going to have the best night. We'll remember this forever, and you have to admit it's going to be way more fun than hanging out in this room watching movies all night."

She has a point. We've done the movie thing a million times. I'm more than ready to try something different. I look over at her, eyeing the gorgeous red dress she has on. She's wearing matching heels and lipstick, and she looks fucking amazing. Her long hair is a few shades lighter than mine, and she's left it loose so it falls down past her shoulders.

"This is either going to be the most epic night of our lives, or it's going to be the memory we cringe at every time we think of it."

"I vote for the epic option. Come on, Natty girl. It's time to shimmy our asses down the trellis."

I laugh at her enthusiasm and fearless determination. If not for Svetlana, my life would be very boring. She helps me step out of my comfort zone and challenges me to be brave. I love her so goddamn much, and there's no one else I'd rather go down in a blaze of glory with. This might prove to be the biggest mistake we've ever made, but we're making it together.

We both sling our tiny purse straps over our heads so they can hang down across our bodies, leaving our hands free right before Svetlana hikes a long leg over the window ledge. She'd already popped the screen out

earlier, resting it against the wall beside the window with a note tucked beneath it.

To whoever finds this letter,

We're safe and fine and will be back before dawn.

Please, please, please, for the love of god, take pity on us and don't mention this to anyone else.

Val, if this is you, I know you'd never rat me out, womb buddy. I promise I'll explain everything when we get back.

Love you lots,

S & N

When I'd read it, I'd just sighed and put it right back under the window, hoping like hell it didn't come into play. She's right. Val would never rat her out, but pulling the twin card only takes you so far. He'd never do anything that would jeopardize her safety or mine. He may not immediately go down and tell Grigori and Feliks, but he would try and find us, and when he did, he'd give us a hell I didn't particularly want to face.

"Slow and steady," Svetlana says, giving me a wink and starting her descent.

With my hands gripping the window sill, I peek out and watch her, my heart rate picking up with each passing second. I'm not great with heights. In fact, I'm really pretty fucking awful about them, and everything inside me is screaming at me to not do this, but once she reaches the bottom, she gives me a big thumbs up, and before I can question it, I'm throwing a bare leg out the window to join her, fully committing myself to this crazy-ass plan.

I refuse to look down, and for the first time in my life, I regret my choice in footwear. Sneakers would've been the wiser choice, but they wouldn't look nearly as cute with this dress. Men will never understand the sacrifices women make. Taking things at a snail's pace, I slowly work my way down, gripping the trellis until my hands ache, thankful that at least Aunt Emily's roses aren't in full bloom yet. This is dangerous enough. I have no desire to throw thorns into the mix.

"Damn your dress is short."

I make the mistake of looking over my shoulder at Svetlana's whispered words, and when I see how far up I still am, I cling to the trellis even tighter

and squeeze my eyes shut.

“Oh no you don’t,” she whisper-shouts at me. “You get your mostly bare ass down here right now! We need to hurry or we’ll miss the Uber and all this will be for nothing.”

I’m not crazy about going down, but I’m really not looking forward to climbing back up and hoisting my ass through the window. I don’t even want to think about how we’re going to manage that one, so I force my eyes open and hook my foot into the next slat, slowly working my way down again. When my toes hit solid ground, I let out a whimper of pure relief.

“I don’t know how in the hell I’m going to force myself back up there.”

Svetlana’s giving me a huge smile, her eyes wide with adrenaline and excitement. “That’s a worry for later.” She holds up the two pairs of rain boots that were sitting on the porch earlier. “Here, hurry up and put these on. It’ll take us forever if we wear our heels.”

I’m completely in the *following orders* phase of the evening, so without a second thought, I tug off my heels and slip my feet into the rain boots that are way too big for me. Hooking my fingers through the straps of my heels, I look up at my partner in crime and give her a nod.

“Perfect. Once we’re further away, I’ll turn on the flashlight, but the moon’s full, so we should be okay. We just need to get far enough from the house. If we trip the security lights, Grigori and Feliks will definitely come out to investigate.”

Just the thought of them catching us right now makes me feel queasy, but I also wouldn’t be at all surprised if Svetlana could come up with a killer excuse on the spot. I’m guessing it would have something to do with moon phases and her need to express thanks to the divine feminine, which would account for our sparkly dresses.

Biting back a laugh, because the longer this goes on, the giddier I start to feel, we race to the woods, giving the house a wide berth before hitting one of the dirt bike trails. As soon as we can’t see the house, Svetlana flicks on the light, leading us further down the path. I’m always surprised by how loud it is in the woods at night. I’ve gotten so used to city noises that I barely register them, but as many times as we’ve been out here, it never fails to surprise me how damn loud bugs can be.

“We’re going straight to hell for this,” I whisper, making her laugh.

“If there’s a hell, I’m pretty sure everyone in the Melnikov family is headed that way, so at least you’ll be with family.”

I wrap my arm through hers and laugh. "Very true."

She checks her phone and then picks up the pace, taking me with her, and I nearly trip over my heavy rain boots. "Come on, Nat. The driver's almost there."

"How does he even know where to stop?"

"I told him to park on the side of the road by the mile marker sign. I'm planning on giving him a very nice tip for his trouble."

"He's gonna need one," I tell her.

After we've walked for several more minutes, she points the flashlight at the trees on our right. Happy with what she sees, she moves us off the path and through a denser part of the woods. I'm just about to ask her if we're lost when we step out near the paved road. Giving a satisfied huff when she sees the car parked on the side of the road about thirty feet from us, she gives him a wave and then uses me for balance while she steps out of her rain boots and slips her heels back on. I do the same and then we stash our boots and flashlight behind one of the larger trees and make our way to the waiting car like it's the most natural thing in the world.

The driver looks like he's only a few years older than us, and when Svetlana opens the back door and we slip inside, he gives us both a wide-eyed, confused look.

"Do you two always hang out in the middle of the woods at night?"

Svetlana gives an easy laugh. "We just came from my boyfriend's house. His driveway is kind of hard to see at night, so we thought it'd be easier to just meet you here." She points back behind us. "It comes out over there, but it's hidden from view at this angle."

Content with her answer, he only nods and puts the car in drive, easing back onto the deserted road. "Okay, well we've got about an hour of driving, but I'll get you there as soon as I can."

I switch to Russian and ask her, "Did you tell him where we're going?"

"No, I gave him the address to a restaurant that's close by. It'll be easy for us to walk there, and the less people who know where we're going, the better." She reaches over and squeezes my hand. "Relax, the hard part is over."

"The hard part is over?"

She laughs at my expression. "Yes, we're out, and look around." She does a dramatic turn of her head, looking out the back window. "No bodyguards. We're completely on our own."

“Yeah, that’s what worries me.”

She nudges my arm with her elbow. “Just think about Dominic. I bet he’ll be there tonight.”

“He can’t see us, Sveta. He’ll tell our dads.”

“We’ll watch him from a distance,” she assures me. “He’ll never be expecting us there, especially not dressed like this.”

She’s not wrong. He definitely won’t be expecting us to just show up at his club, and the chances are pretty high that he won’t even be there tonight. I’m surprised by how badly I’m hoping he is. I want to see him again, even if it is from across the room.

The drive feels impossibly long, and by the time our driver pulls up to the curb of the restaurant, I’m tapping out a crazy rhythm with my foot and trying like hell to not sweat through my dress. Svetlana pays the enormous fee and slips him a large tip.

“Damn, thanks.” He smiles and pockets the money. “You need me to wait around to drive you back?”

“No, that’s okay. We’re not sure how long it’ll be. Thanks, though.”

He’s obviously wishing he could get another tip, but he just smiles and says, “Maybe I’ll get lucky and catch you two again.”

Svetlana returns his smile. “Maybe.”

I give him a quick smile and then follow her out of the car. He waves before driving away, leaving us on a crowded sidewalk in the middle of a city that we’ve never once been on our own in. It’s thrilling and scary, and my heart races as I follow her towards the large club at the end of the block. *La Dolce Vita* is written across a sign on the front of the building in a tasteful, red script, and everything about this place screams high-end. This isn’t the type of club that lets just anyone in, and that’s when it dawns on me that we have no way of actually getting through the front door that’s manned by two very muscular bouncers. We’re underage and without fake IDs or a hope in hell.

I meet Svetlana’s honey-brown eyes. “Please tell me you have a plan.”

“Of course I do.” She hooks her fingers around my arm and leads me past the long line and around the side of the building. “Kind of,” she adds right before we step into a creepy-as-fuck alley that runs along the back of the club.

“I’m starting to seriously question whether or not we’re going to survive this night.”

“Of course we will,” she quickly says and then lets out a relieved sigh when she sees a man up ahead. He’s smoking a cigarette while leaning against the brick wall. The light above him is only bright enough to let us know he’s there, but it isn’t until we walk closer that we get a good look at his face. He’s wearing a suit, and when he sees us, his thin lips spread into a smile that has the hairs on the back of my neck rising.

“Fucking hell,” I whisper in Russian just loud enough for Svetlana to hear.

She squeezes my hand and gives the guy a smile, although, unlike his, hers is more friendly than sexual.

“Hi,” she tells him.

He gives a soft laugh and takes another drag of his cigarette. “Are you two lost? Didn’t your daddies ever teach you to not walk down dark alleys at night?” His eyes run over us again. “Especially when wearing so little.”

“It’s kind of a funny story,” Svetlana says, and I know her well enough to know she’s trying like hell to sound calm. She may be the bravest person I know, but even this is a little much for her. “We forgot our IDs at home, and we were hoping maybe you could sneak us in through the back.”

He raises a dark brow at her while the corner of his mouth lifts in a wicked grin. “And why would I do that? What do I get out of it?”

“Oh my god,” I whisper, and Svetlana squeezes my hands so tightly I have to grit my teeth to keep from gasping.

“Money, of course.” Svetlana holds up several hundreds. “Our daddies *did* teach us to not blow some random dude in an alley just to get access to a nightclub.”

He lets out another soft laugh at her audacity.

“But I see no reason why you can’t make a lot of extra money tonight, and all you have to do is look the other way while we walk in. We won’t even make you hold the door for us.”

He takes another slow pull of his cigarette, blowing out the smoke in a long, steady stream while he thinks the offer over. After what feels like an eternity, he grins and holds out his hand. She puts the money in it, and he makes a point of looking in the other direction. Svetlana shoots me a triumphant smile as she opens the door, pulling me in with her before he can change his mind.

Loud, thumping music hits me full force when the door shuts, leaving us in a dark hallway. We keep walking, following the music until the

hallway opens up, revealing a packed dance floor that's filled with pulsating bodies, each of them swaying to the beat of the music. It looks wild and untamed, everything I've never gotten to experience, and my feet start walking towards the mass of bodies before my brain can even catch up.

Svetlana lets out a whoop of pure joy, right by my side every step of the way. This still might end badly, but for now, we're free, and I intend to enjoy every damn second of it. With my head thrown back, I move to the beat of the music, losing myself in the crowd and the darkness of the club and the freedom of complete anonymity.

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Chapter 5

Dominic

I scrub a hand over my face, more than ready to get out of the club and go home for the night. I'd come in to check on some things, and what was supposed to be an hour ended up lasting three. Even with the thick door of my office shut, the annoying, rhythmic thud of the music isn't muffled nearly enough.

Shutting my laptop, I stand and roll out the kinks in my neck before slipping my suit jacket back on. I'm not looking forward to walking through the crowd out front, but I need a shot of whiskey on my way out more than I need to avoid the interaction. I don't make it far before a young woman starts to saunter over to me. I ignore her and raise a hand to the bartender on duty. Ricky takes one look at me and immediately reaches for the bottle of scotch he keeps below the counter, the one that's worth more than all the other bottles on display put together, the one that only I'm allowed to drink. He fills it and places it in front of me, and when he's sure I don't need anything else, he goes back to the other customers.

"Hey."

I look down, annoyed that the woman hasn't taken the hint and given up yet. I ignore her and take a sip of the whiskey, letting it sit on my tongue before I swallow.

"I said hey," she says again, threatening to ruin the one goddamn thing I've been looking forward to all night.

"I heard you," I tell her, taking another small sip that I desperately try to savor, but she insists on opening her mouth again.

"You want to dance?"

I look down at her again. Her blonde hair is pulled up into a high ponytail, the dress she's wearing is skintight and hugging her curves, and the hungry look in her blue eyes makes it obvious I can fuck her if I want. The only problem is I don't want to. The blue of her eyes reminds me of someone else, and fuck does it piss me off. Since I saw Natalya a week ago, I can't get her out of my goddamn head, and I can't seem to muster up enough interest in anyone else to try to fuck her from my mind.

"No," I tell her, making it clear with my tone that there's no talking me into it.

Irritated, I down the rest of my whiskey, not even attempting to enjoy the damn thing. I'm just about to leave when my eyes run over the dance floor, landing on the *principessa* herself. Convinced my mind is playing tricks on me, I keep watching her, knowing it can't really be her. There's no way in hell her family would let her come here, and there's no way in hell she'd be so fucking stupid as to come to a nightclub dressed in the tiny dress this woman is wearing, but then she turns her body, and I get a good look at her face and the woman dancing beside her.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," I growl in Italian before making my way to the mass of bodies. I'm almost to her when I see a man's hand land on her stomach, gripping her like she belongs to him, and all I see is red. I see the shocked look she gives, the way her beautiful eyes widen first in shock and then in anger. She tries to brush him off her, but he just moves his hand to her hip, tightening his fingers even harder and pinning her smaller body to his. I'm two seconds away from killing the fucker when Natalya surprises the hell out of me by elbowing him in the gut, and when he leans down to take in a breath, she punches him in the nose, breaking it easily. She steps back so she doesn't get blood on her dress, and when she turns back around, face lit up in a triumphant smile, the last thing she's expecting to see is me.

"*Principessa.*"

Her mouth falls open, and this time when her eyes widen, it's all from fear. My cock, the same one that couldn't be bothered minutes earlier when the young blonde was offering herself up, suddenly decides that now is the time to wake up.

"Dominic." My name is a breathy pant on her full lips, and I'm just about to answer her when the jackass she punched starts walking over. I quickly step between them, putting Natalya behind me.

The man holds his hand up to his bloody nose and points behind me. “She fucking hit me!”

I lean closer, filling the space with my body. I can tell he’s rethinking his decision to come to me for help. When I’m sure I have his full attention, I say, “And I will fucking kill you if you ever put your hands on her again. Now get the fuck out of my club and don’t come back.”

As soon as he runs off, I grab Natalya’s wrist and point a finger at Svetlana. “Follow me, right fucking now.”

She nods, looking just as scared as Natalya, and follows me as I lead them back to my office. I squeeze her wrist a little tighter, feeling the rapid beat of her pulse against my skin, and it does something to me. I know she’s not going to run off, but I don’t let go of her. My long fingers wrap so easily around her slender wrist, and the last thing I want to do is separate myself from her, so I don’t, not even after we’re in my office and I’ve slammed the door shut behind us.

I position my body in front of Natalya’s and lift the wrist I’m holding, inspecting her hand to make sure it’s okay. The pad of my thumb drags along her knuckles, and she lets out a soft gasp, but it’s not from pain. Her hand looks fine.

When our eyes meet, she says, “Just because I like girly things doesn’t mean I don’t know how to throw a punch. I might not love it as much as Mia, but there was no way in hell my dad wasn’t going to teach me how to defend myself.”

“Yes, he’ll be thrilled to know you punched a guy on my dance floor tonight.”

“You can’t tell him,” she quickly says, reaching up with her other hand to grab my forearm like she had when she’d begged me to sneak her into my club.

“They’ll kill us,” Svetlana adds.

I look at the two of them, running my eyes over the tiny dresses they’re wearing, nearly groaning when I think about Natalya out there dancing in those pink heels and this nonexistent scrap of fabric.

“Do you have any idea how badly tonight could’ve gone?” I let out a frustrated groan. “How the fuck did you even get in here?”

When her light blue eyes meet mine, she licks that top, full lip of hers and then clamps her mouth shut. I lean down, invading her space while she

keeps a death grip on my arm and I feel her pulse speed up even more beneath my fingers.

“You better start talking, *principessa*, or I’m going to start dialing.”

I watch as emotions run across her beautiful face—fear, uncertainty, a quick flash of anger, and then a good bit of desire when I bring my face even closer. My thumb lightly grazes over her inner wrist.

“Silence is not an option. If you make me waste my time by going through all the security footage, I’m going to be even more pissed off than I am right now. How did you get into my club?”

“We paid a guy to let us in the back door.”

Her whispered confession isn’t at all what I’m expecting. I thought for sure she was going to say they used fake IDs, not that they snuck into a dark and deserted alley and paid off one of my men.

“Who was it?” My words are low and rough, and she winces at the barely concealed rage behind them.

“I don’t know his name. He was smoking.”

Fuck, it has to be Angelo. He’s the only one who uses the back alley for smoke breaks and who’s stupid enough to take a fucking bribe. All the other guys have been with me long enough to know what I’d do to them, but Angelo has only been working for my family for a few months.

“Don’t move,” I tell Natalya before leaving my office. I walk back out to the main area of the club, scanning the crowd until I find Dario leaning against the wall in one of the back corners. He appears relaxed, but I know he’s taking in every detail around him. My cousins are already fitting in nicely in America, and bringing them here full-time is a decision I won’t be regretting anytime soon.

“What’s wrong?” he immediately asks me when I walk over to him.

“Grab Angelo and hold him for me.”

Dario sighs, knowing this isn’t going to end well for our newest member. “What’d he do?”

I usually wouldn’t tolerate questions, but Dario’s family and that affords him certain privileges. “He let Natalya and Svetlana Melnikov bribe their way in through the back door.”

“What a fucking idiot,” he mutters before nodding his head, already walking past me to go and grab him.

“Not a word to anyone,” I tell him.

“Of course.”

Pushing Angelo from my mind, I walk back into my office to face the problem that I hadn't planned on or wanted. Scrubbing a hand over the two-day old stubble that covers my face, I sit on the edge of my desk, resting my hands on the dark wood on either side of me while I try to figure out what the fuck to do.

When the silence is too much for them, Svetlana says, "We promise we'll never try anything like this again. Just let us go, and no one will ever have to know about tonight."

I look over at her and let out a harsh laugh. "One of my men took a bribe and snuck you in. Do you really think I'm going to just let that slide?"

"Well, can't you handle him without telling our dads?"

Natalya's soft voice has me darting my eyes to her. "I'm sure he won't make the same mistake again."

Their family might run the most notorious Bratva in America, but it's painfully obvious that they aren't privy to all the horrific details of what they do. They may have an idea of the violence that goes on, but that's all they have—just a vague idea that's nowhere close to the truth of how gruesome and unforgiving this line of work can be.

My eyes stay locked on hers when I say, "No, he will not."

She pales a bit, finally realizing that their little stunt is going to have consequences that neither one of them ever dreamed of.

"Can we please just go?"

Her whispered plea shouldn't affect me like it does. She looks so fucking small in her tiny dress, and the heels that still only barely bring the top of her head to my shoulders, and all my instincts are telling me to pick her up and never fucking let her go. I grip the edge of the desk tighter, refusing to give in to such an asinine urge.

"Please," she begs again, and if she had any idea how much I liked hearing that word on her tongue, she'd never utter it in front of me again.

"I don't appreciate the position you're putting me in."

"I know, and I'm so sorry, Dominic, but I swear we'll never do anything like this again. We've learned our lesson, and we just want to go home and forget this ever happened."

"How the hell did you sneak out?"

Her eyes dart quickly to Svetlana before she says, "We're staying at the farmhouse tonight. Val, Luka, and Max are there, and we told them we were

just going to hang out and watch movies in our room. Feliks and Grigori are there, too.”

“And you just walked past them?” I ask, disbelief lacing every word.

“Not exactly.”

When she doesn’t elaborate, all I have to do is raise a brow at her and she starts talking.

“We snuck out the window and climbed down the trellis, then we snuck through the woods. We had an Uber waiting for us on the side of the road.”

I close my eyes and groan “Jesus Christ” as I think about all the millions of things that could’ve gone wrong with their plan. Before I can talk myself out of it, I stand back up and look down at her. “I’m taking you back, and I swear to god, Natalya, if you ever try anything this stupid again, I will march your ass to your dad so fast it’ll make your damn head spin.” I look over at Svetlana in case she thinks I’ve forgotten her part in this. “That goes for you, too.”

They both quickly nod their heads, willing to agree to any damn thing I say as long as it keeps their dads from knowing what they’ve done tonight. Before we leave my office, I reach down and grab Natalya’s wrist again, keeping her close to me while she reaches her other hand out for Svetlana’s so we’re forming what has to be the world’s most fucked-up line. I’m hard as a goddamn rock for the eighteen-year-old standing next to me while she’s clutching her cousin and scared to death. Something is truly fucked in my head, but I don’t have the time to analyze it right now. I’m too busy trying to figure out how to sneak their asses back before anyone notices and all hell breaks loose.

Her heart pulses against my fingers, rabbit fast and sexy as fuck, while I lead her back through the club. Men stare at her because it’s impossible not to, and my grip tightens on her when I see the way they slowly drag their eyes up and down her body. When one man’s mouth lifts up in a predatory grin, I move my arm so it’s wrapped around her shoulders, pulling her flush against me while I give him a look that has him quickly turning away.

Aside from two flimsy straps that crisscross along her back, her skin is almost completely bare and so fucking soft. The urge to run my fingers lightly down her spine and trail a line along her lower back before cupping one round ass cheek in my palm is strong. It’s all I can think about as we weave our way through the crowd. When we’re close to the front, the two bouncers on duty see me and immediately step aside.

I ignore the curious looks, knowing I need to get their asses out of here before anyone recognizes them. The Bratva doesn't normally come into our side of the city, but it's not unheard of, and I'd rather not take the risk of someone spotting them.

"Damn," Svetlana whispers when I stop in front of my Lamborghini and open the passenger door for them. "Those scissor doors are so cool. It might have been worth sneaking out if we get to take a drive in this."

"Sveta," I warn.

She gives a soft laugh. "Too soon for jokes?"

"Way too soon." I eye the two of them. "There's no backseat, but I'm sure you can figure something out."

Svetlana nudges Natalya, letting her know she should go first. I release the tight grip I still have on her, letting my fingers drag down her shoulder before stepping back and walking around to the driver's side. There are few things that I allow myself to love in this world, but my car is one of them. It had cost a small fortune to get a manual transmission Lamborghini, but my god it was worth every damn penny. Sinking into the buttery soft, leather seat, I look over at my two passengers and shake my head. They're so scrunched up they can barely fit in the seat. Without thinking, I grab onto Natalya's slender waist and scoot her closer so she's sitting on the console—an improvised middle seat that would piss me off if she were doing it in any other car, but I know she's safe with me.

Doubting her ability to keep herself safe after the stunt she pulled tonight, I feel the need to say, "Don't ever sit like this in anyone else's car. You need a seatbelt."

"I won't," she whispers, keeping her thighs closed while trying to remain as small as possible.

Her bare leg is right by the gearshift, and I know this is going to be the longest damn drive of my life. Starting the car, the purr of the engine momentarily puts me in a good mood, but as soon as I shift into first and my hand brushes against her thigh, that good mood starts to sour. The harder my cock gets, the more irritated I become.

We've haven't even been in the car five minutes when Svetlana asks, "Can we listen to music?"

"No."

"It's a long drive," she reminds me.

“And it would be even longer if I had to listen to your shit music the whole damn way.”

“Hey, you don’t know my music is shit,” she argues.

“Did you like the music at the club?”

Her answer comes fast. “Of course.”

“Exactly,” I tell her, still feeling the headache throbbing at the base of my skull from being forced to listen to that upbeat, poppy shit for several hours. “No way in hell am I going to drive both your asses out into the middle of nowhere while listening to anything even remotely close to what plays in that club.”

“You need to get with the times,” she says, making me let out a harsh laugh.

“I’ll get with the times when your generation starts making music that actually sounds good.”

Natalya wiggles into a more comfortable position on the console, and when I shift again, my hand brushes even further up her thigh. I hear the soft gasp she gives, and for some insane reason my instinct is to brush a finger along the back of her knee to let her know it’s okay. We’re away from the lights of the city now, and the movement was covered in darkness, but the memory of how soft her skin had felt is all I can think about. I force my hand back to the steering wheel before I do something really stupid like slide it between her thighs.

Svetlana only manages twelve minutes of silence before she starts talking again—ten minutes longer than I thought she’d be able to pull off.

“So you’re here to stay then? You’re not going back to Italy?”

“I like it here,” I tell her, not elaborating.

“Why haven’t you ever gotten married?”

“Sveta,” Natalya whispers and then tells her something in Russian.

They have a conversation that I’m not privy to, but it must not do much good, because as soon as Natalya stops speaking, Svetlana switches to English and asks the question again.

“I have no desire to get married,” I tell her.

“Don’t you want kids?”

I let out a harsh laugh. The idea of getting a woman pregnant has always been one of my top three worst fears. Number one—my dick stops working, and number two—going blind. Being tied to a woman because I knocked her up and then having to care for and support the baby has always come in

solidly at number three. Before I can answer her question, a very vivid image of me thrusting into Natalya and burying myself deep as her small body clings to mine while her pussy clenches me tightly, pulling the cum from my body, flashes through my mind.

What the ever-living fuck was that?

I'm so stunned by the fantasy that it takes me a second to realize Svetlana's talking again.

"So you're just going to be alone for the rest of your life? Don't you have a girlfriend or something?"

"Just ignore her," Natalya says. "She's never understood personal boundaries."

"Oh, I understand them. I'm just too nosy to care."

I give a small smile at her honesty and answer her questions. "No kids, no girlfriend," I tell her. Daring a quick look at Natalya, I see the corner of her mouth lift up the tiniest bit like she's trying hard to fight the show of emotion.

The next few minutes are quiet until Svetlana points a finger up ahead. "It's up here next to the mile marker sign."

When I slow down and shift again, I swear Natalya presses her thigh just a little bit harder against my hand, making sure the contact between our bodies lasts as long as possible. Pulling along the side of the road, I look over at the dark woods and shake my head.

"I can't believe you two did this."

Svetlana huffs out a breath. "Is it really all that surprising? We have zero freedom and bodyguards watching us every second of every day. It was bound to happen sooner or later. You should be thrilled this is all we got up to tonight."

I turn my head, looking over at her. "Do you think maybe those rules are in place for a reason?"

"The guys are given way more freedom than we are," she argues.

"There's a reason for that, Svetlana. You know this." I know they don't know all the details of what happened to their aunt, but they know enough. "You know what your family does for a living, and that puts a target on all your backs. There have been a few attacks lately, so you might want to get used to the bodyguards. I have a feeling they're going to be tightening things up even more."

“Great,” she mutters while Natalya turns her face to mine and asks, “What kind of attacks?”

I brush my thumb along her skin in the lightest of touches and say, “Nothing for you to worry about. Come on, it’s time to sneak you two back in.”

Stepping out of the car, I take off my suit jacket and toss it on the now empty passenger seat before shutting the door and looking at the line of trees in front of me. Traipsing through the dark woods isn’t at all what I planned on doing tonight, but life is rarely what you think it’s going to be.

“Which way?”

Svetlana turns her head, eyeing the woods in front of us, and I don’t like the confused look she’s wearing. She points to the right and gives a determined nod of her head. “There. That’s where I hid our boots and flashlight.”

She leads the way with Natalya behind her, and I take the rear. The full moon helps, but it’s still dark without anything else to help illuminate the way. When we reach the trees, Svetlana walks around, searching for her hidden stash, and after several minutes of listening to her thrash around and mutter in Russian, I let out a heavy sigh.

“Can’t find it?”

“I left it right here,” she insists, pointing at the tree she’s been circling like a crazed person.

I push a button on my watch, illuminating the time. It’s after one, and I can’t spend all goddamn night standing here. I need to get back and deal with Angelo, and I’d like to at least get a few hours of sleep.

“We don’t have time to waste looking for it. Can you find the trail from here?”

“Yeah, I think so. It should be straight ahead. It’s going to be a real bitch in heels, though,” she growls.

“Maybe it’ll help teach you a lesson.” I look down at Natalya, who’s still standing next to me. She’s been quiet this whole time, and when she takes a few steps forward and nearly trips on a stick, I reach out to steady her. With my hand securely on her hip and the other one gripping her arm, she looks up at me and sucks in another quick breath.

“Thanks,” she whispers.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll just put all my weight on my toes. I’ll be fine.”

I wait until I'm sure she's steady before slowly letting go of her. Svetlana is several feet ahead of us, and when she turns back she says, "Found it," and lets out a relieved sigh. I stay close to Natalya, making sure she doesn't trip again, until we're all three standing on the dirt bike path.

"Fuck this," Svetlana says, pulling her heels off and placing her bare feet on the packed dirt. She looks back at Natalya. "Just take 'em off. It's so much easier."

Natalya looks down at her pink heels and matching painted toes and hesitates. "I'll be fine," she insists, and I know she'd rather walk on broken glass than put her bare feet in the dirt. A smile tugs at my mouth, but I refuse to give it free rein.

Svetlana lets out a soft laugh and starts walking. "You're so going to regret that tomorrow when your feet are covered in blisters."

"Better blisters than hookworms," she responds, making me laugh.

"Oh my god," Svetlana groans like they've had this conversation many times. "That's insanely rare around here." She looks back at me. "We watched a documentary about parasites one night for reasons I can't explain, and it seriously screwed with her mind."

"They were huge," Natalya tells me, "and you could see them through the bottoms of their feet."

After about twenty steps where she almost falls three more times, I sigh and scoop her up into my arms bridal style. She lets out a surprised gasp and flings her arms around my neck.

"What are you doing?" she whisper-shouts at me.

Her mouth is dangerously close to mine when I say, "It's going to take you hours to reach the house at the rate you're going. This is easier." I don't add that the idea of her small feet covered in blisters tomorrow doesn't sit well with me. "Just relax, *principessa*, and let me carry you."

She nods and once I start walking, she slowly begins to relax in my arms, eventually leaning her head against my shoulder.

"I'm really sorry about tonight," she whispers so only I can hear. "It didn't go at all like I thought it would."

"How did you think it would go?"

I feel her shoulders give a small shrug. "I thought we'd get to see your club, dance and have a bit of fun, and then sneak back home and never do it again."

"You don't think you would've ever tried to do it again?"

She gives a faint laugh, and I feel the heat of it against my neck. “No, I about had a heart attack climbing out of that window. I barely made it down the trellis. I’m not so sure I’m cut out for the dangerous life.”

It’s my turn to give a soft laugh at her confession. I squeeze her tighter against me for just a second and say, “Good.”

Her body molds to mine, fitting perfectly against me, and when I see the opening in the woods up ahead, I’m more annoyed than anything. I’m not ready to put her down yet. At the edge of the yard, I stand by Svetlana, scanning the property and trying to see any signs of anyone or any indication that something is off. Everything is quiet, though, and I know it would be buzzing with activity if anyone had realized these two were missing.

We sneak our way to the side of the house, and when I see the trellis in front of me, I instinctively pull her tighter against me again. I do not like the idea of her climbing back up there. She could’ve broken her goddamn neck if she’d fallen.

“Do you have your phone on you?”

She lifts her head and looks at me. “Yeah. Why?”

“Take it out and put my number in it.”

Reaching down, she grabs the small purse that’s resting in her lap and digs her phone out, adding me to her contacts when I give her my number.

“Text me so I have your number, and then text me again when you’re inside so I know everything’s okay.”

“Okay,” she whispers, sending me a quick text before putting her phone away again.

My eyes run over her lips, noticing again that the top one is slightly bigger, and all I can think about is how badly I want to close the distance and suck on it. I’m grateful for the dark, because I’ve been rock-hard since we left the club, and this painful erection won’t be going away anytime soon.

“I’ll go first,” Svetlana says, breaking the spell of Natalya’s full, sexy lips. “Thanks for everything tonight, Dominic. I promise we won’t do this again.”

“You better not,” I warn her. “This is a one-time thing. I’ll be calling your dads next time.”

She gives me another one of her dad’s cocky grins before hiking a foot up onto the trellis. She climbs it with surprising ease, and I make sure to

look away, because I have no desire to see up her short dress. Only once she's scurried into the window and whispered down, "I'm in," does it occur to me that there's no reason for me to keep holding Natalya.

Svetlana's head disappears inside, but I still keep a tight grip on the young woman in my arms. I look up at the second-story window and shake my head. "I don't want you climbing that."

"I can't walk in the front door," she reminds me. "I'll be fine. If I made it down, I can make it back up."

"Barely," I remind her, meeting her eyes again. "You said you *barely* made it down."

"I'll be fine," she whispers.

"Promise me you'll never do anything this dangerous again."

She keeps her eyes locked on mine and whispers. "I promise I won't."

"Good girl," I tell her, the words falling out of my mouth before I can stop them. Her lips part and not even the darkness around us can hide the blush that spreads across her cheeks. I lower her to the ground, but before I can stand back up, she surprises me by leaning closer and kissing my cheek while wrapping her arms around me for a hug.

"Thank you," she whispers against the shell of my ear, and I barely have enough brain cells working to remember to angle my hips so she won't feel my hard dick. My hand splays out along her back, and I pull her closer, breathing in the sweet scent of her before kissing her cheek and letting her go.

Standing back up to my full height, I lick my lips, desperate for the taste of her and using all the self-control I have and then some to resist pulling her back into my arms. This is ridiculous. I shouldn't want her, and I can't have her, so I should be marching my ass out of here and putting all this behind me, but instead my feet are glued to the spot I'm standing in and I'm nervous as hell at the thought of her scaling this damn trellis.

Gripping the flimsy-ass wood, she steps a heeled foot into one of the slats and slowly starts to make her way up. She's barely made it three feet when her foot misses the next opening and she slips down. I quickly grab her, groaning at the feel of her round ass pressing against my dick. She sucks in a quick breath, feeling the hard length of me digging into her ass.

"Easy, *principessa*," I whisper, digging my fingers into her hip to help steady her. She tries to get a better grip and ends up wiggling her ass, pulling a groan from me that can only be described as feral. "Jesus Christ,

Natalya, get your sweet ass up this goddamn trellis right fucking now,” I grit out, knowing I’m at the end of my rope. She needs to get away from me, or I’m going to cross a line that neither one of us will ever be able to come back from.

She lets out a soft whimper as I give her hip one last squeeze and then push her further up the trellis, forcing distance between us. I can feel her body softly shaking, but she grips the wood tightly and slowly starts to make her way back up. Instead of looking away this time, I keep my eyes glued to the tiny dress that’s crept up even higher, exposing more of her perfect thighs and the barest hint of her ass.

Jesus, I’m going straight to hell.

I don’t start breathing again until she’s crawled safely into the window, her beautiful body no longer illuminated by the moonlight. She peeks her head back out to give me a cute smile and wave.

“Thank you,” she whispers again.

I give a small wave in return. “Goodnight, *principessa*.”

I wait until she’s put the screen back in place and then turn to leave. The walk back to the car isn’t nearly as much fun without her small body in my arms, and by the time I’m in my car and racing back to the city, I’m dangerously pissed off and more than ready for this night to be done.

The club is still packed when I pull into my reserved spot. Feeling a twinge of déjà vu, I bypass the long line of people who are waiting to get in and nod to the same bouncers on duty. I make my way into the club and towards the hallway that’s off limits to everyone except me and my top men. The door at the end of the hall is guarded and locked, and as soon as Marco sees me, he hurries to unlock it, opening it wide for me to step through.

The basement is my favorite thing about this club. It used to be a large wine cellar, but after I bought the place, I outfitted it for something that would be way more useful to me. The first part of the room is still a wine cellar, so if anyone does manage to sneak their way down here, they won’t see anything incriminating, just several rows of very expensive bottles of wine, but a second door is hidden behind one of the shelves, and when I move it aside and unlock the door, I find Angelo tied to a chair with a gag in his mouth. Dario and Alessandro sit in two other chairs on the opposite side of the room, long legs outstretched and bored looks on their faces.

Angelo immediately starts letting out muffled screams and incoherent words that I don't give a shit about hearing. The gag is only on him to save my cousins the annoyance of having to listen to him. The entire room is soundproof, and even if it wasn't, no one would hear his screams above the pounding music in the club.

"That took a while," Dario says in the same bored, monotone voice he always uses.

I effortlessly slip back into my native language to answer him. "It was a long drive, but they're back safe." A hint of irritation claws at the back of my mind because Natalya never did text me like I'd asked her to.

Looking back over at Angelo, I ask them, "Did he say anything?"

"Only that he had no idea what was going on, and he swore on his mother's life that he didn't do anything wrong." Alessandro lets out a soft laugh and points a finger at Angelo, who understands every word we're saying. "Lucky for you, we're not going to take that promise seriously, or we'd be paying a visit to your poor mother."

Angelo's face pales at that. His eyes dart to mine, desperately trying to convey something to me. I walk over and tug his gag down so he can speak.

"I swear I didn't do anything, Mr. Alessi." His words come out in a desperate, fast rush.

"But you did," I tell him, squatting down so he can see me better. "You took a bribe and let two women into my club earlier. You remember that?"

I can tell by the shocked expression on his face that he does.

"But it was just a couple of girls. I swear I didn't touch them."

"If you had, I would be giving you a slow death right now." His face pales even more at that. "Those two girls are the daughters of Vitaly and Lev Melnikov."

"Fuck," he breathes out in a shaky whisper. "I swear I didn't know. I never would've let them in if I'd known."

I stand up and grab the gun from the shoulder holster I'm wearing and flip the safety off.

"Seriously? I'm getting shot for that?" Angelo's gone from scared shitless to pissed in record time.

I point the gun at him and think about all the things that could've happened to Natalya tonight because he let her into the club. It's bad enough she was pawed at on the dance floor, and if she hadn't punched him and I hadn't been there, who the fuck knows what could've happened.

“I’m shooting you because you disobeyed an order. You’re not allowed to sneak underage girls into the fucking club.” I take a step closer. “But I’m killing you because you put her life in danger.”

Not giving him a chance to respond, I aim the gun between his terrified eyes and pull the trigger. It’s a fast death, over in seconds with nothing but blood and brain matter to speak of the violence that just took place. Well, that and the body at my feet with a giant hole in his head.

“Get someone down here to clean this shit up.”

Dario and Alessandro watch me put my gun away, neither one even slightly upset by what just happened. The three of us have been around this since birth. We were born into it, covered in sin from the moment we took our first breaths.

Before I walk out, I add, “Not a word of this to anyone. Natalya and Svetlana were never here. Angelo fucked up, and I dealt with it. End of story.”

I don’t wait for the compliance that I already know I have. I trust them, and I trust very few people. Irritated for reasons that I don’t want to think about, I storm back to my car, ready to be done with this fucking night. As soon as I’m behind the wheel again, the faint floral scent of her perfume fills my lungs, still lingering in my car and reminding me, despite everything, of how badly I want her.

Frustrated and more than a little pissed off, I grab my phone. No new texts, just the quick smiley face she’d sent me so I’d have her number. I’m a patient man, I’ve had to learn to be in this business, but all that willpower dissolves with her.

Unable to resist, I send her a message.

Chapter 6

Natalya

I'm still wide awake and staring at the ceiling when I hear my phone vibrate on the nightstand next to me. My heart gives a fast jump when I see Dominic's name.

You never texted me like I asked you to, principessa.

I don't know how he does it, but I can feel the irritation coming off the words and hear the accented disappointment. My fingers are already flying across the screen, unable to ignore him.

Sorry. I figured since you saw me climb in the window that you knew we were okay.

His response is immediate. *I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't want you to do it. Is everything okay?*

My heart races as I type out a response. I can't explain my reaction to Dominic, but it's all-consuming. *Yeah, everything's fine. Svetlana is already asleep. No one knows we left.*

Why aren't you sleeping?

I can't tell him the truth, that I'm not sleeping because I'm too busy thinking about how good it had felt to be held in his arms, or that I can't stop remembering the hardness I'd felt pressing against my ass, or that every time I try to close my eyes, I hear his accented voice in my ear, whispering my name.

I settle on: *Nerves. My mind is still racing from everything that happened.*

After several seconds, I start to worry that he's not going to answer, but then his text comes through.

I'm glad I was there tonight. I don't like thinking about what could've happened if I hadn't been.

A few seconds later, I get two texts, one right after the other.

Try and get some sleep, Natalya.

Call me if you ever need anything.

And the final one has me sucking in a quick breath.

Sweet dreams, principessa.

I reread his texts several times before typing out a simple *Night, Dominic.*

I wait to make sure he isn't going to send anything else, and then because I can't help it, I pull up the photo I'd sent myself from my dad's phone last week at the supper. The photo of Dominic holding me as a baby fills my screen. He looks younger in the photo, but he hasn't aged that much, and I swear he looks even sexier now than he did then. I'm just a baby in the photo, but it's obvious I was just as enamored with him then as I am now.

I keep staring at the two of us until I finally force myself to set my phone aside before I end up texting him again and making a fool of myself. My mind refuses to stop racing as I replay everything that happened tonight over and over again. My hand stings a little bit from punching that asshole, but it's nothing compared to the throbbing ache that's going on between my thighs. When I close my eyes, I can still feel his hands on me, the way his finger had brushed along the inside of my knee, the deep, masculine groan he'd given when my ass had pressed against him—I'm lost to the memory, and it takes hours for me to fall asleep.

The next two weeks pass by in a stressful blur that's a mix of nervously waiting to get caught for what happened and wishing like hell Dominic would text me again, but he doesn't, and I haven't seen or heard from him in fourteen days. It bothers me way more than it should. He's more than twice my age, the don of a powerful mafia, and the sexiest man I've ever seen. I've spent more than one sleepless night imagining him with another woman in his arms and in his bed, and it's slowly driving me crazy.

Knowing I need to get out of the house, I grab my bag and head for the kitchen. Mom and Dad are out on one of their date nights, which always involves a ride on Dad's motorcycle and them coming back super late with huge smiles on their faces, looking like a couple of guilty teenagers. Sasha ordered a bunch of Chinese food earlier, but I'm not in the mood. I've got a

craving for lasagna, and I blame it on the smoldering hot Italian that I can't get out of my head.

"Hey, I'm going to run out and get something to eat. You guys want anything?"

Sasha and Mia look up from their huge cartons of food. Sasha's already put a big dent in the sweet and sour chicken, and Mia looks determined to finish off the crab Rangoon before Sasha remembers they're there.

"We have food," he says, waving at the white boxes covering the counter.

"I have a craving for lasagna. I'm just going to run and grab something to bring back. I won't be long."

"Are you going to Mama Sofia's?" Mia's words are muffled because of the huge bite she just took.

"Why on earth would I ever go anywhere else?" I ask, already tasting the delicious red sauce and homemade noodles.

"Bring back extra garlic bread," she tells me.

"To go with your Chinese food?"

"I'll eat it later," she says with a laugh.

"I'll help her," Sasha says, and then they both raise a white carton in a toast.

I laugh and start for the door. "You got it. Two extra orders of garlic bread coming up."

When I get to the parking garage, Grigori and one of the newer bodyguards, Pavel, are sitting in the SUV. Sasha must've ordered extra for them, because when they see me through their windshield, Grigori drops his egg roll and gets out.

"Something wrong?" he quickly asks, walking over to me.

"No, I'm just going to grab some supper. I have a craving for Italian. I'll be right back if you want to stay here and finish your supper," I suggest, but the look he gives me makes it clear that won't be happening anytime soon.

"Come on, I'll drive," he tells me, pulling a set of keys out of his pocket and heading for another black SUV. I don't bother arguing. I just follow and get in the passenger side. Grigori's a good man, and he'd have a heart attack if he knew that Svetlana and I snuck out while under his watch. It would devastate him, and I hope like hell he never finds out.

"I'm guessing we're going to Mama Sofia's?"

I smile and look over at him. "Best Italian food in the city."

“It is,” he agrees. “You’d never know it from the outside, though.”

“It’s a hidden gem.”

He gives a soft laugh and takes a right out of the parking garage, heading us towards the east side of the city, the side Dominic controls. It’s not an issue for us to go there since our families are on friendly terms, and it’s not my fault the restaurant happens to be located across the invisible dividing line. Once we pass it, though, I swear I can feel him. I know it’s all in my head, but the feeling lingers all the same.

Grigori manages to find an empty spot, parallel parking near the entrance to the restaurant.

“Nice,” I tell him, giving him a big smile and a thumbs up.

He laughs, but before I can open the door, he grabs my arm to stop me. The mood shifts as his eyes turn hard and serious. There’s no longer a trace of the easy laugh he’d just given. His mouth is in a tight line as he turns his head, scanning the area around us for anything that looks even remotely suspicious. I stay quiet and still, letting him do his job, and only when he gives a small nod do I reach for the handle again and open the door. He’s by my side in seconds, walking with me while keeping a close eye on our surroundings. It all looks like a normal, busy night in the city to me, but I know Grigori is trained to see things that I can’t.

I stay by his side when we enter the restaurant. I’d placed the order on the drive over, so the food is already bagged and ready to go. I was right about this place being a hidden gem. The small restaurant with peeling paint and booths that probably looked great ten years ago but are now worn thin from too many asses doesn’t scream luxury food, but it definitely is. As soon as you walk through the glass door that’s always smudged with hand and fingerprints, all you can smell is pure heaven. Red sauce, garlic bread, and the best, freshest herbs in the city. It’s sensory overload in the best way possible.

Squeezing our way to the front counter, I give him my name and quickly pay for everything. Within minutes, we’re weaving our way back out past all the other hungry people waiting in line. I’m carrying the bags so Grigori’s hands are free, and we’re almost to the SUV when I hear several loud popping sounds in rapid succession, like it’s the Fourth of July and someone just lit a strand of firecrackers.

Before I can even register what’s going on, Grigori lets out a grunt of pain and throws me to the ground, covering my body with his. The bags of

food fly from my hands, spilling across the pavement, and all I can hear are screams of terror, and all I can smell is the strong garlic from the bread that's been tossed from the bag and trampled underfoot.

"Grigori!" I scream, feeling the back of my shirt start to soak with something hot and sticky.

He lets out another pained groan and fires off several shots. Seconds later, he's handing me a bloody key fob. "Go," he grits out. "Dominic's house is closest. Go, Natalya. Now!"

"I'm not leaving you," I quickly say, trying to turn around and see how badly he's been hit.

"Yes, you are." He fires off another shot and pulls his phone out, already calling for backup. "Go! Now!"

The fury in his voice has me moving my ass, scurrying across the hard cement as Grigori keeps firing to give me cover. I lose my heels in the scuffle, but with the adrenaline pumping through my body, I barely notice the rough concrete scraping at my feet. It's been drilled into my head enough times to know that I need to get my ass out of here, so that's what I focus on. I can hear my dad's voice in my head as I push the button to open the door and jump inside.

If anything ever happens, you do whatever Grigori tells you to do. You listen to him, princess, no matter what. His job is to keep you safe. He will give his life to save yours, and you will let him, because I can't survive the death of a child.

I'll never forget the way he'd looked as he told me that, and I promised myself that I'd never disobey Grigori because seeing the hurt in my dad's eyes was too much for me. Tears stream down my face, but I don't stop. I gun the engine and pull out with a squeal of tires, racing towards Dominic. I'm still a few minutes away, so with shaky hands, I pull my phone out of my pocket and call him. He answers immediately.

"Is something wrong?"

I'm crying too hard to speak clearly, but I manage to say, "Help, I need help. Grigori's been shot."

"Where are you?"

The worry and anger in his voice helps steady me. He'll keep me safe. I know he will.

"I'm driving. I'll be there in just a few minutes."

"Don't hang up. Stay on the phone with me. Just breathe, *principessa*."

“Mm-hmm,” I say in a shaky voice. My whole body is trembling, and my heart is racing so fast I’m afraid it might never slow down again.

Dominic hears my ragged breathing and says again, “It’s okay, Natalya. Take a big breath for me.”

He hears my inhale. “Good girl, now give me another.”

I do as he says, slowly breathing in and out until I see the iron gates that line his property. They’re always closed, but right now they’re open, and he’s standing right outside them, phone to his ear as he paces in his beautiful, Armani suit beside his guards. As soon as I’m close enough, he opens the door. I press the brake while he puts it in park for me because I’m shaking too hard to do anything else.

Without a word, he pulls me into his arms, holding me tightly against his chest while he barks out orders in Italian. He feels the blood that’s covering my back and lets out another string of Italian.

“Are you hurt?” His accent is thicker than normal while his hand runs along my back, searching for injuries.

“No, it’s Grigori’s blood,” I whisper. “I just left him there.” I start to cry again when I think about the man I left bleeding on the ground.

“Good. That’s exactly what you were supposed to do.”

Cupping the back of my head, he sighs and gets in the SUV, keeping me on his lap as he drives us down his long driveway. It’s a tight fit, but there’s no way in hell I’m letting him go. When we’re in front of his house, I wrap my arms tighter around his neck, pressing our bodies together because I’m terrified he’s going to put me down and walk away.

“Please don’t let go,” I beg him.

Before he opens the door, he hugs me back just as tightly. “I wasn’t planning on it, *principessa*.”

I let out a relieved sigh against his neck, clinging to him when he steps out of the SUV while taking me with him. He’s carrying me bridal style again, but he surprises me by lifting me up and saying, “Wrap your legs around me.”

He doesn’t have to ask me twice. I wrap my arms and legs around his strong body, feeling him tuck the light, summer dress I’m wearing around me before placing his forearm under my ass, so I’m held close and completely covered up. Grabbing his phone, he walks me to his front door, storming in and slamming it shut behind us.

If I wasn't still so shaky, I'd take a few minutes to admire his gorgeous home, but I'm too frazzled, barely noticing the dark, wood floors and plush, red rugs that cover them. Gorgeous works of art cover the walls, but it's not gaudy and extravagant. It feels cozy, like he took the time to pick pieces of art that he actually enjoys looking at instead of random ones that are meant to impress. Tasteful, refined, and authentic, just like him.

He carries me down a long hall, stopping before a set of dark, wooden doors. When he opens them and leads me into a large office, I lift my head in curiosity. I feel like he's just brought me into a sacred room, a space that not too many people get to see. There's another large rug in a gorgeous, deep red color and on top of it is a large desk with two leather chairs in front of it. I'm convinced he's going to set me down in one of them, and when I squeeze him tighter, he gives my back a soft, reassuring pat as he walks past them. When he sits in the buttery soft leather chair behind his desk, he takes me with him.

"I need to call your dad and let him know you're okay."

"Okay," I whisper, still clutching him as I straddle his lap.

In seconds, I hear my dad's frantic voice coming from the phone. He's so upset he doesn't realize he's speaking Russian.

Dominic cuts in. "She's fine, Lev. Grigori sent her over to me. She's safe and unharmed."

"She's safe?"

I almost start crying again at the sound of my dad's voice cracking.

"She's safe," Dominic tells him again, "and I want her to stay here."

Surprised, I sit up straighter, pulling back enough so I can see his face. His dark eyes stay locked on mine while his hand lightly grips my hip.

"She needs to come home," my dad argues.

"We don't know who did the attack or why," Dominic reminds him. "You know how safe my home is, Lev. I have plenty of guest rooms. I give you my word that she'll be safe here."

"Let me talk to her."

Dominic raises a dark brow at me, and when I nod my head, he hands me his phone. I stay on his lap, legs straddling him in a completely inappropriate position, but I have no fucks to give right now. Tremors still run through my body, and my words are still shaky when I say, "I'm here, Dad."

“Jesus fuck, are you okay?” He’s switched back to Russian, and the fear in his voice has my eyes tearing up again. I let out a shaky breath when Dominic reaches a hand up and lightly brushes the pad of his thumb along my cheek, wiping the tears away.

“Are you hurt, Natalya? Are you there? What’s going on?”

“I’m here,” I quickly say, realizing I haven’t been paying any attention to anything other than Dominic’s soft touch and the downright feral look in his eyes. When I reposition my hips to get a little more comfortable and settle back against him, my mouth drops open at the hard length I’m now sitting on. He doesn’t say anything, but I see the way the corner of his mouth lifts in the smallest of smirks, and I swear his eyes turn a shade darker.

“Tell me what happened?”

I focus on my dad’s voice and switch to English so Dominic can hear the story too, refusing to think about the hard dick beneath my ass. Starting from when we left the parking garage, I tell them everything that happened, and when I finish, both men are silent.

“Is Grigori okay?” I finally ask.

I hear my dad’s heavy sigh. “I’m not sure yet. He called for backup, and they were able to get there fast enough to get rid of his gun before the police and ambulance showed up. I have men searching the area, trying to find out who’s behind this, but it might take a while before we know anything.”

“I left him, Dad,” I whisper. “He covered me with his body and saved my life and then told me to drive to Dominic’s, and I did. I just left him there.”

Dominic’s face softens when he wipes away the tears that have started falling again, and I clutch his white, button-up shirt with my free hand, needing to ground myself to something.

“You could’ve died if you’d stayed,” my dad reminds me. “Grigori knew what the job required before he agreed to it, princess, and he would not have wanted you to stay. He would’ve felt like he’d failed you if you had, and I would’ve had to kill him.”

“Dad,” I say, hoping he’s joking.

“His job is to make sure you’re safe and to keep you alive no matter what. I know it sounds harsh, but your life is worth more to me than his. He’s been watching over you since you were born, and he never would’ve

forgiven himself if something had happened to you, and I would've never forgiven him. Thank you for leaving." He lets out another breath, and I can easily picture him running a hand through his hair while pacing the floor. "I told you I couldn't survive losing a child, Natalya, and I meant it. My family is everything to me. I need all of you."

"I know, Dad. That's why I left. I remembered what you told me, and I ran."

"I'm so glad you did. God, your mom is going to have a fit when I tell her what's happened."

"Well, you don't have to tell her all the details."

He lets out a soft laugh. "She'll know I'm lying, and she'll get it out of me. She always does."

I can't help but smile. "My dad, the fearless underground fighter and Bratva boss."

"None of that means shit when I'm talking to the woman I love, you know that. She has me wrapped around her finger, and I love it." I hear his phone ding, and a few seconds later he says, "I need to go, sweetheart. We're all meeting at your Uncle Roman's. Dominic says you can stay there, but I can come and get you."

"No," I say, probably quicker than I should, so I hurry up and add, "I'd rather stay here, if that's okay. I'm not ready to go back out there."

"Let me know if you change your mind, and I'll be there. I love you, honey."

"I love you too, Dad."

I hand Dominic his phone back, and he keeps his eyes on mine while he says, "She can stay here as long as she needs to. I can have one of my men pick up some of her things if you want to get a bag ready."

"She's not moving in, Dominic," I hear my dad say. It's not an angry tone, but it's not all that friendly either.

"I think she should for a little while."

My eyes widen at that, and he gives me another soft smirk before he continues.

"We don't know who attacked them or why. It's possible it was random. It was in my territory, and I already have men looking into it, but something tells me this has nothing to do with me or my family. This feels personal, and if Natalya was their target, then the safest place she can be is here."

There's no reason to put anyone else in your family in danger, and they'll never expect her to be hiding out with the Alessi family."

My dad is silent while Dominic rests his hand back on my hip.

"I give you my word that she'll be safe here, Lev. I'll guard her with my life."

"Fine," my dad growls out. "Don't let her out of your sight. I'll have Mia pack a bag for her if you want to send one of your men over. Call me if you hear anything."

"I will."

My dad hangs up right before Dominic puts his phone away. I'm still straddling his lap, his hand is still resting on my hip, and the hard length of him is nestled tightly against my ass. I have no idea what to do. Part of me wants to hop up in embarrassment, and the other part of me wants to pull him closer and press my lips to his. He makes me want things I know I shouldn't want.

Paralyzed with indecision, I sit on his lap and watch him. The man is gorgeous. His age doesn't take away from that. If anything, it just adds to it. I love the tiny bit of grey that's just starting to come in around his temples and the small lines that appear at the corners of his eyes when he gives me a big smile. I love how safe he makes me feel, I love how powerful he is, and I love the overprotective way he is with me. When he'd caught Svetlana and me in his club, he hadn't treated her the same way. She and I both noticed it, and when I'd pulled up to his house tonight, he hadn't reacted like any other man in his mafia would have. He'd acted like a man who cared about me, like a man who was distraught over the idea of me being hurt—not the idea of Lev Melnikov's daughter being hurt, but of *me* being hurt.

His dark eyes run over my body, and my breath hitches when I feel his cock press even harder against me. At the sound of it, his eyes lift to settle on my lips. He watches me, his jaw in a tense line, fingers digging harder into my hips, before finally pulling his eyes back to mine.

"Maybe you staying here wasn't such a great idea."

His voice is low, accent thicker, and when I clutch his shirt tighter and lean closer, he lets out a soft groan.

"I want to stay here. I feel safe with you, Dominic."

The look he gives me is ravenous. "You shouldn't, *principessa*. Safe is the last thing you are with me."

Instinct has me leaning closer, even though my internal fight-or-flight is screaming at me to get some space between his cock and my body. Ignoring that part of my brain, I bring one hand up to his face, grazing his stubbled jaw with the tips of my fingers. He doesn't move, just watches me as I memorize every inch of his chiseled jaw, but when I lean even closer, he groans and cups my face, holding me still.

"You need to get cleaned up. I can show you the room you'll be staying in."

"I don't want to get cleaned up right now."

He lets out another soft groan and runs his thumb along my top lip. He whispers something in Italian that sounds sexy as hell.

"What does that mean?"

"It means it's time for you to go and get cleaned up."

The corner of his mouth lifts up again at the scowl I give him. "That's not what it meant."

"Do you speak Italian?"

"No."

"Then I guess you'll never know."

Irritated that he won't tell me, I tilt my head and swipe my tongue over the thumb that's still hovering by my mouth, and say in Russian, "I want you to kiss me, Dominic, and then I want you to carry me to your bed and show me all the things I've been missing."

The look he gives me has me letting out a soft laugh. "I take it you never got around to learning Russian."

"I've been busy." When I don't say anything, his eyes narrow slightly while he tries to figure me out. "You're not going to translate?"

"I will if you will."

"I guess we'll both have to remain in the dark."

Before I can argue, he grabs my hips and lifts me off him like I weigh nothing. When he stands, I run my eyes over him. It's impossible to not notice the way his cock is straining against his pant leg. My fingers itch to reach out to him, but he quickly repositions himself and buttons his suit jacket, effectively hiding himself from my hungry eyes.

When I look up at him, there's an amused grin playing at his lips, and when I frown even harder, he lets out a soft laugh.

"Come on, *principessa*, you'll feel better after a bath."

Part of me wants to argue, but the bigger part of me really wants to wash Grigori's blood off, so I follow him out of his office and up a wide staircase, my bare feet absorbed by the plush carpet before I remember my scraped feet. I stop and lift one foot up, looking to see how bad it is. I'd been so hyped up on adrenaline and fear and then distracted by Dominic and the ache he always causes between my legs to worry about my feet, but when I see the scrapes and dried blood, I hiss out a breath and look up at him.

Hearing me, he pauses on the steps and looks back at me. As soon as he sees the blood, he growls something in Italian and picks me back up again.

"You said you weren't hurt."

He sounds pissed, so I quickly look back at the small blood stains I've left on his stairs. "I'm so sorry. I'll clean the stains out as soon as I'm out of the bath."

He stops mid-step and meets my eyes. "Do you seriously think I give a fuck about my carpet right now?"

"I thought that's why you were mad," I admit.

"I'm irritated because you've been hurt this whole time, and I should've taken better care of you."

"Oh," is all my stunned mind can manage, because that never once occurred to me.

He sighs and surprises the hell out of me by pulling me closer and kissing my forehead. "Forgive me, *principessa*. I'm not used to watching over anyone."

He carries me up the stairs and down a long hall. I glance around, not even trying to hide my curiosity, and when he brings me into the last room at the end and opens the door, I'm expecting a sparse guest room, but instead he steps into a room that's obviously being lived in. The king-size bed doesn't even begin to fill the massive room. The walls are painted a masculine blue, making the white trim stand out even more, and when I see the large picture that's framed on the wall, I can't look away. I've never seen anything like it. It's a picture of a sculpture, a woman who's being held by a man, actively trying to get away from him, but he has a tight hold on her, fingers digging into her thigh and hip, holding her in place no matter how much she fights him. The work is unlike anything I've ever seen, the way his fingers show indentions on her marbled thigh, the expression of terror on her face, and the way the three-headed dog is snapping at her

heels, making it clear that there's no escape for this woman—I'm drawn to it in a way that I don't fully understand.

When he walks me into the connecting bathroom and the picture disappears from view, I turn my head to try and get another glimpse.

"What was that?"

"The picture?"

"Yeah, I've never seen anything like it."

He sets me down on the counter and slips out of his suit jacket, tossing it down next to me. He rolls up the sleeves of his dress shirt, revealing the tatted-up forearms that I haven't once stopped thinking about.

"Do you like it?"

I'm so focused on his tanned, colorful forearms that I forget all about the picture he's talking about and instead reach a finger out to trace the octopus tattoo that stretches down his inner arm. The talent behind the art is stunning. It looks like it's alive, like it's about to stretch one tentacled arm out and touch me.

"I love it," I whisper, grazing my finger over the vein in his arm that appears to be a part of the sea creature. It's not a tattoo I would've expected to see on him, and I love that he always surprises me. The rest of his arms are covered in images of skulls, black roses with blood dripping from them, a raven with his hungry mouth open and waiting, and an hourglass that's empty and shattered—all of them molded into an intricate design that's mesmerizing and a little scary. It's a sharp contrast to the octopus, and I wish I knew its significance. I want to know everything about this man.

When I hear his soft laugh, I look up at him. "What?"

"I was talking about the picture in my room. Do you like it?"

Heat rushes to my cheeks, and I know I'm beet red when I say, "Oh, yeah, I like it a lot." I think about the way the man had been holding the woman and of how desperate she was to get away from him. "I probably shouldn't, I guess, because it's kind of grim, but I also couldn't look away and already want to see it again. It's violent, but it's also beautiful."

His eyes soften at my answer. "What makes it beautiful to you?"

I shrug. "The talent behind it is beautiful, the way it's a marble statue, but you can see the indents on her thighs from how hard he's gripping her. I can't imagine how difficult it would be to create something like that. It's also beautiful because it made me feel so many different things at once. It's the kind of art you could get lost in."

Embarrassed by my rambling, I let out a soft laugh and look away. “I don’t know. I really don’t know what I’m talking about. I don’t know much about art. I’m probably way off.”

He hooks a finger under my chin and pulls my face back, so I’m facing him again. “I like hearing your honest thoughts about things. If I’d wanted a professional art critic’s opinion, I could’ve Googled it.”

The corner of my mouth lifts up at his tone. He keeps his finger under my chin for a few more seconds before stepping back with an audible sigh. Squatting down, he grabs onto one of my feet, lifting it so he can see the damage.

“The statue is called *The Rape of Proserpina*, although *abduction* is a better translation, and it’s by an Italian sculptor named Gian Lorenzo Bernini. It was made in the 1600s, and when I saw it for the first time in Rome, I did exactly what you just said. I stood there and stared at it for hours. I was completely lost in it—the beauty and violence and craftsmanship. I couldn’t look away.”

“What is it about?”

He runs his thumb over the bottom of my foot, checking for cuts, and I bite my bottom lip to hold back the groan that’s threatening to rise up.

“You’re probably more familiar with her name from Greek mythology—Persephone. Bernini is showing Pluto, or Hades, taking her to the Underworld.”

“He kidnapped her?”

He gives my foot one more caress before gently letting it go and reaching for my other one. His brown eyes lift to mine. “He saw her and he wanted her, so he took her.”

My heart races at his words and the intent way he’s staring at me.

Finally, he looks away and says, “It was a myth to explain the seasons. When Persephone is in the Underworld, it’s winter. When she’s returned to her mother, it’s spring.”

I suck in a quick breath when he hits a tender part of my foot. “Did she fall in love with him?”

He lifts a dark brow. “With the man who kidnapped her?”

“Yes. Did she?”

He gives a small grin. “Depends on which myth you believe.” Looking down to see my foot better, he asks, “Do you think she was capable of falling in love with a monster?”

“Yes,” I say without hesitation. “Maybe he wasn’t a monster with her. Maybe she’s the one person he wasn’t a monster with.”

“The *principessa* is a romantic,” he murmurs.

“Maybe I am.” I meet his dark eyes and then hiss out another breath when he hits a cut on my heel.

“I am sorry about your feet.” He sounds so distraught over the idea of my feet being a little cut that I immediately reach out to comfort him, resting my opened palm against his cheek.

“I’m fine. It barely hurts.”

He leans into my touch just enough for me to feel the increased pressure against my hand. It’s obvious he hasn’t shaved for a few days, and his light beard tickles my skin while sending a shiver down my spine. Grabbing my hand, he presses me harder against him before pulling back to kiss my palm.

When I reposition myself, my dress slides up a bit, and he growls another string of angry Italian when he sees my bloody knees. My lips part when he runs his hands up my calves to grip the backs of my knees. The soft caress against my skin reminds me of the night he’d driven Svetlana and me back to the farmhouse, and goosebumps rise along my skin.

He notices and lifts his dark eyes to mine. The heat in them has an ache starting between my legs. It’s a familiar feeling that happens every time he’s near, and when instinct has me parting my thighs another inch, he groans and tightens his fingers, digging them into my skin in a possessive grip that makes me think of Bernini’s sculpture and the way Hades’s fingers had dug into Persephone’s thigh, marking her and claiming her as his.

His eyes drag over my body in a slow sweep that starts at my eyes and ends at the peek of inner thigh he’s getting. It would be so easy for him to lift my dress and see everything, but he doesn’t move his hands. If anything, he grips me tighter like he’s actively trying to resist ripping my dress up. My fingers brush along his light beard where my palm is still pressed against his face, and the sigh he gives is just as shaky as my breaths.

“You are pure temptation, *principessa*, and that’s a very dangerous thing to be around a man like me.”

“Why?” I whisper.

His pupils are blown when he meets my eyes again. “Because I want you, and everything inside me is screaming at me to take what I want.”

I can feel every rapid beat of my heart pounding against my chest when I lean closer so our faces are only a few short inches apart. I've never done anything like this before. I've always known I've been living a sheltered life, but never has that been more apparent than right now. I've never even been kissed before, and I'm leaning towards this sexy man like I know what the hell I'm doing. I'm clueless, and he must sense it because he tightens his grip on my legs and pulls back before our lips can touch. I try to hide the hurt I feel, but I know he can see the embarrassed flush of my skin.

He closes his eyes and softly shakes his head before standing and letting his hands drop from my legs. "I'll get you something you can wear."

I watch him leave, running my eyes over his broad shoulders and trim waist before settling on the world's firmest ass. I keep watching until I can no longer see him, and I'm still staring at the empty doorway when he reappears a few minutes later, carrying a white T-shirt and navy blue joggers.

"These are going to be huge on you, but at least they have a drawstring so you can tighten the waist. I'll send one of my men to get your bag while you're getting cleaned up." He sets the clothes down and walks to the large tub in the corner. Turning on the taps, it starts to fill while he grabs a towel and washcloth and the shampoo and body wash from the massive, walk-in shower.

"Let me know if you need anything else, and I'll make sure you get it."

Giving me one last look, he turns to leave, but I jump down from the counter and grab his wrist, stopping him and wincing all at the same time.

He groans and lifts me off my sore feet, shaking his head in irritation. "After your bath I'm bandaging your feet and you're staying off them for the rest of the night."

Setting me on the edge of the tub, he turns off the water and then cups the back of my head. He looks like he's about to say something, but instead he leans closer and presses a soft kiss to my forehead.

"Holler when you're done, *principessa*, and I'll carry you to your bed."

Without waiting for a response, he turns and walks out, shutting the door behind him.

Chapter 7

Dominic

Jesus Christ, this is not good.

I pace my bedroom, refusing to let my mind wander to the naked, eighteen-year-old in my bathtub, willing my cock to go down. I desperately need some blood to go to my brain so I can fucking think, but my cock's been hogging it all since the second I wrapped my arms around her. She'd looked so damn scared when she'd driven to me, and nothing else had mattered except getting her as close to me as possible. I'd needed to feel her heart beating against my chest and the heat of her breaths on my neck to convince me that she was safe, and I hadn't given the slightest fuck that my men were watching.

She could've been killed tonight, and that thought alone nearly brings me to my knees. It doesn't make any fucking sense. I've had forty-three goddamn years to find a woman who captivates me, and no one else has, no one's even come close, and now the one woman I can't have is the only one that I want.

It's only because I know she's forbidden, I try and tell myself, but I know that's not true because I didn't feel anything like this towards Svetlana, and she's just as off-limits. No, it's only Natalya that gets my blood pumping and my cock hard, and it's only her that has me slowly crossing lines that shouldn't be crossed. This is the second time she's felt how hard I've been, and I was seconds away from kissing her and hiking her dress up just moments ago. I never should've told Lev that she should stay here, but the thought of her leaving wasn't an option, not after what happened tonight. I need to know she's safe, and the only way to do that is to keep her right next to me.

While she finishes her bath, I force myself to leave the room instead of pacing with a raging hard-on like some pathetic bastard who can't get control of himself. My cock slowly starts to go down, and when I'm almost at the bottom of the stairs and I see the bloody footprint she'd left on my carpet, all the lust I'd just felt is replaced with a searing rage that threatens to consume me.

Knowing someone tried to hurt her, tried to fucking *kill her*, makes it difficult to breathe. I've known rage before. I was consumed by it while trying to find my sister's killer, but this is different. This doesn't feel like the pain from knowing someone I love and care about has been hurt. This is an anger that resonates in my core and cuts me to the quick. This is about someone daring to hurt what's *mine*, and that's a dangerous fucking thought to have.

She's not mine, I remind myself, but they're just words, and every part of my body knows that. There's a truth that goes deeper than words and thoughts and forced actions, and that truth is screaming at me right now that Natalya Melnikov is most definitely mine.

Lev would be so fucking thrilled to know that.

I shake my head, burying the truth I'm not ready to face down deep before I walk into the kitchen. Lucia is busy preparing supper, but as soon as she sees me, she drops the wooden spoon she's using to stir the pasta sauce with and rushes over to me. Lucia started working for my family when she was twenty and I was just a baby. She's always been like a second mother to me, and I'm not at all surprised to see the concern in her eyes. Her heart has always been too big to work for a family like this, and I know she only stayed because of her love for my sister and me. Isabella's death nearly killed her. She felt it just as strongly as the rest of us, and when I'd told her she could retire, that she'd always be taken care of financially, the hurt on her face had ensured I'll never ask again. She's family, and she'll be here until the day she dies.

"How is she?"

"She's fine, Lucia, barely a scratch on her. She's soaking in the tub now. I'm going to make sure she eats and then force her to get a good night of sleep."

Lucia nods like she thinks my plan is a good one and goes back to stirring. "I'll make you a tray of food to bring up. She needs her strength."

I can already imagine the huge helping of food Natalya's about to get, and I can't help but smile. Lucia shows her love through food, and my little Russian is about to get a huge dose of it. I ignore the way my mind immediately switched to the possessive *my*, and instead pat Lucia's shoulder on my way out.

"Thank you, Lucia. I'll be back to get it in a minute. I want to talk to Dr. Bianchi before Natalya is finished with her bath."

"Tell him supper's almost ready."

I smile back at her, because we both know she's never late on having supper ready and that the doctor never misses a meal. Dr. Bianchi came to my father before I was born, desperate and willing to do anything to get revenge on the man who'd killed his wife in a hit-and-run. My father delivered the man to him, not caring that it was the son of another powerful mafia don, and Dr. Bianchi got his revenge and pledged his life to the Alessi family. He never got over the death of his wife, but I know he and Lucia have had a thing going on for well over a decade. I know everything that happens under my roof, but I pretend I don't see it because if they wanted me to know, they'd tell me themselves. He's nearing eighty, and she's in her late sixties, and both of them immediately shut me down anytime I mention retirement.

Heading downstairs, I peek into the operating room I had built for him that rivals the best hospital in the city. It's saved more of my men's lives than I can remember, but it's currently empty and dark. Knowing he has to be around here somewhere, I keep walking to his private area of the house. Having a doctor nearby has proven to be one of the best decisions my father ever made, and when I see Dr. Bianchi sitting in a chair by the window, book in hand and reading glasses on, a sadness hits me that I wasn't expecting. I let very few people into my personal life, and I've already lost so many of them. I'm not looking forward to losing the few I have left.

As soon as he sees me, he puts the book down, concern written all over his face. "Is something wrong?"

I raise a hand for him to remain sitting when he starts to get up. "Everything's fine. I just need some antibiotic cream and a few bandages."

His eyes run over me, already fully in doctor mode. "Did you get hurt?"

I give him a pointed look because he knows me better than to think I'd come running to him for a band-aid, but his concern for me overrides his common sense sometimes.

“Natalya Melnikov was attacked not long ago. Her bodyguard took three bullets but still managed to send her to me. They were at a restaurant a few miles away. She’s unharmed, but her knees and the soles of her feet were rubbed raw in a few places, and I want to make sure it heals like it should.”

Whatever he hears in my voice has the corner of his mouth lifting up.

“What?” I ask, feeling defensive and mentally replaying everything I just said, trying to find what would cause the amused look in his eyes.

“I didn’t say anything.” He stands up and takes off his reading glasses, slipping them into his shirt pocket before motioning for me to follow him. He may be close to eighty, but he’s still pretty damn spry, and there’s no denying his skill as a doctor hasn’t wavered at all. We both know he’s not getting any younger, though, and he finally agreed that we need to bring someone else onboard to help him out and eventually take over. He’s being very picky about it, but I’m confident he’ll choose the perfect person when the time is right.

I follow as he goes into a storage room and grabs several bandages and a tube of cream. Holding them out to me, he asks, “Do you want me to take a look?”

“No, it’s okay. They’re minor scratches. I’m being overly cautious.”

Again he gives me an amused look.

“I don’t know why you’re looking at me like that.”

He huffs out a small laugh. “I’ve known you a long time, Dominic.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you don’t usually come down here for antibiotic cream because someone has a tiny boo-boo.”

“She’s Lev’s daughter,” I tell him, ignoring the *boo-boo* comment. “I gave him my word that she’d be safe and looked after.”

He gives another laugh because obviously his old age has made him reckless as well as fearless. When he sees the look I’m giving him, he smiles even bigger and says, “Well, this should be interesting.”

“I don’t know what in the hell you’re talking about.” I take the medicine and bandages and turn to leave. “Thanks, Dr. Bianchi.”

“I’ve told you a million times you can call me Carlos,” he says from behind me.

I turn my head without slowing down. “And I’ve told you a million times it’s a sign of respect, old man.”

He laughs again, and before I'm too far away, I yell, "Lucia said supper is almost ready."

I turn back around in enough time to see his eyes light up, and then it's my turn to give an amused laugh. He waves his hand at me in a playful, *shut the hell up* kind of way that has me laughing as I close the door and head back into the kitchen. The tray Lucia made is already loaded to capacity and ready to go. I notice she's put my supper on here as well, and I don't question her on it. Instead, I pick it up and tell her thanks and make my way back upstairs to my room.

The mouthwatering scent of spaghetti wafts up to me, reminding me of how hungry I am. I'd gotten sidetracked with work and hadn't bothered eating lunch. The truth is I haven't had much of an appetite over the last two weeks. All I've been able to think about is Natalya, and it had taken all my willpower to not text her like some fucking desperate teenager. My pride is the only thing that had kept me in check.

Walking into my bedroom, I shut the door behind me for reasons I can't explain and set the tray of food down on the dresser. The bathroom door is still shut, so I give a soft knock and when she doesn't answer, I call her name. When she still doesn't answer, I knock harder and feel my heart rate start to rise.

"Natalya, are you okay?"

Images of her unconscious and under the water from some head injury I didn't know about run through my mind. Had I asked her if she'd hit her head on the sidewalk when Grigori pushed her down? I can't fucking remember. A cold sweat breaks out along my spine, and I give her three seconds to answer. When she doesn't, I open the door, terrified of what I'm going to find.

Rushing into the bathroom, I see her in the tub and freeze. She's not unconscious and under the water like I'd feared. Her head is resting back against the towel she'd put under her neck, dark strands of hair framing her face, eyes closed, and naked body on full display. I didn't have bubble bath, so nothing is hiding her from my view. I let out a harsh breath at the sight of her small, wet body. My eyes start at her feet, running up her tan, slender legs, and when I reach the bare, smooth skin of her sex, I have to choke back the growl I want to give. Fisting my hands to keep from reaching out and touching her, my gaze continues upwards, drinking in the sight of her—hips that I want to sink my fingers into, a stomach I want to kiss my way

up, and two perky breasts with nipples in the prettiest shade of pink I've ever seen. She's fucking delectable, a woman I could spend a lifetime fucking and getting lost in and still never have enough.

When her lips part in a small sigh and I see that full, top lip of hers, I growl out in Italian, telling her how badly I want and need to fuck her. As soon as the words are out of my mouth, her eyes pop open. Confused and disoriented, she looks around before meeting my eyes again.

"Dominic?"

It takes her less than five seconds to remember where she is, and when her eyes drift down to her naked body, a red blush creeps up her chest, settling in her cheeks and turning them redder than I've ever seen them. I drink in the sight of her, knowing I need to turn around but unable to do so.

"Dominic," she whispers again, and I hear the need in her voice.

I'm so close to stripping out of my suit and joining her, but she's so fucking innocent and so fucking off limits. With a pained groan, I turn around and run a hand through my hair, forcing myself to take a steadying breath.

"I'm sorry. You didn't answer me, and I was worried you'd passed out. I'll wait for you in the bedroom."

Knowing I can't handle the temptation of being around her right now, I get my ass out of the bathroom as quickly as possible. Back to pacing my room with a raging hard-on, I experience another case of *déjà vu*, and it pisses me the fuck off. This situation is spiraling out of control, and I'm doing a shit-poor job of getting things back on track. I've just readjusted my cock when I hear the bathroom door open.

All my hopes that things will get easier from here on out since she won't be naked fly out the damn door when I see her standing in my clothes. The sweats are way too big on her, but she's managed to tighten the drawstring so they're at least staying on. I curse myself for choosing a white T-shirt, and I can't help but wonder if subconsciously I'd done it on purpose just to torture myself as much as possible. She's not wearing a bra, and her nipples are still hard, pressing against the thin fabric and taunting me like nothing else on earth ever has.

She shifts her weight, shy once again as she looks up at me. When she hesitates, I say, "Lucia made a tray for us. You need to eat."

Looking down at her feet, she chews on her bottom lip. "I don't want to stain your carpet again."

“Fuck,” I sigh, pissed at myself yet again for forgetting about her feet. I’d been too preoccupied with thoughts of her naked body to remember the cream and bandages I’d gotten for her. Closing the distance, I pick her up and carry her to the bed. I force my mind away from thoughts of her tits pressed against me and the fact that she’s most likely not wearing any underwear, and instead think about her hurt feet.

She watches me grab the bandages and cream, never taking her eyes off me, and I wish I knew what she was thinking. Her expression is a mix of so many things—confusion, hurt, desire, worry, and I want to take it all from her. I want to erase everything that happened to her tonight and give her what her big, blue eyes are begging me for, but I can’t.

With a tired sigh, I kneel in front of her and place her foot on my thigh while I grab the tube of antibiotic cream and a band-aid.

“You really don’t need to do this, Dominic. I’m okay.”

“No, you’re not. You’re hurt, and I’m going to take care of you.” When it looks like she’s about to argue with me, I give her ankle a squeeze and shake my head. “There’s no use fighting me on it, *principessa*. I will get my way on this.” I may not be able to get my way on everything I want tonight, but she’s damn well getting her feet looked after. That at least I can do.

She sighs but keeps her mouth closed, giving up and letting me doctor her feet, and I can’t resist giving her a soft smile, pleased at her submission.

Cupping the back of her foot, I hold her still while rubbing a thin layer of ointment on the small scrapes and cuts. The bleeding has stopped, and it’s certainly not anything I’d be worried about if it were on my own feet, but I like taking care of her, so that’s what I do. I take my time, slowly sticking band-aids where I want them, and when both feet are bandaged up to my liking, I hook my fingers under the sweatpants at her ankle and slide the material up, exposing one knee to my hungry gaze.

She inhales sharply when I run my thumb along her skin, tracing an invisible line along the side of her knee until my finger dips under her pants, lightly grazing her inner thigh.

“I shouldn’t be allowed near you,” I whisper. “I shouldn’t be left alone with you, and I sure as fuck shouldn’t have you in my bed.”

With a shaky hand she reaches out and runs her fingers through my hair, and that one touch threatens to undo me. I close my eyes and lean into her, knowing it’s wrong, knowing I shouldn’t, but also unable to muster up enough strength to pull away.

“Maybe you should stop worrying so much.”

I sigh and open my eyes. Her blue eyes are searching mine, naively begging me for more, but she doesn’t have the faintest fucking idea of all the things I want to do to her.

“Maybe you should just do what you want,” she whispers like she can read my damn mind.

Leaning closer, I hear the breathy sigh she gives when my lips are hovering over her scraped knee and I raise my eyes to hers.

“You couldn’t handle what I want to do to you, *principessa*.”

I see the stubborn glint in her eyes, and before she can argue with me, I run my tongue over her knee, opening the small tears back up as the sharp tang of her blood hits me hard. My cock is painfully stiff and straining at my pants, and when I give her another lick, she lets out the softest, sexiest moan I’ve ever heard. Digging her fingers into my hair, she clings to me as her body starts to shake. I allow myself one more slow lick before pressing my lips to her skin and kissing her knee.

When I pull back, she’s breathing heavy and parting her thighs even more. I run my eyes over her and then let out a heavy sigh before getting to work on her knees. I put all my focus on getting her cuts cleaned up and the band-aids on, but nothing can take my mind off how badly I want to fuck her. I’m drawn to her in ways I can’t explain, and for the first time in my life, I begin to doubt my willpower. I’ve never acted on impulse before. I’m always in control. Even when plans get disrupted or work forces me into a situation that’s completely unplanned and unexpected, I’m *always* in control.

Natalya effortlessly fucks all that up. One look from her, one touch, one hint of her scent and I’m left disoriented and feeling like I’m completely adrift. It’s annoying as fuck, and I desperately need to learn to get it under control.

I pull her sweats back down and give her ankles a soft squeeze. “Sit back against the pillows, and I’ll bring you your supper. You need to eat something.”

“My mom called while I was in the bath.” She scoots back against the pillows, looking so small in my huge bed and so utterly perfect and at home. “She said Grigori is in surgery. They expect him to recover, but I think his career as my bodyguard is over.”

I carry the tray over and set it on the bed next to her before sitting on the edge. “It’s not your fault,” I remind her, because I don’t like to see her looking so sad.

She fusses with the end of her shirt, trying to keep her hands busy. “I guess not, but I still feel bad. Do you think they’ll let me visit him in the hospital.”

“No, absolutely not.”

She sighs, but my answer doesn’t surprise her. “Yeah, I thought not. I can order him some flowers, though, and visit with him as soon as he gets out.”

“I’m sure he’d appreciate that.” I hand her one of the full plates and then put a big piece of homemade bread on top.

“Jesus, that looks good.”

The awe and excitement in her voice has me smiling. “Lucia’s an amazing cook.”

“We were on our way to get lasagna tonight,” she admits, grabbing her fork and twirling it around the pasta. “I had a craving. Sasha and Mia were having Chinese, but I was craving Italian.” Her cheeks blush at her words, and she keeps her eyes firmly on her plate.

“I’ve never been to Mama Sofia’s. I can’t imagine it’s all that good.”

“Oh my god, it’s so good, Dominic. You have to try it.” She’s so strong in her conviction that her eyes meet mine while she says it. I laugh because what the fuck does a Russian know about good Italian food?

“Yeah, I bet,” I tell her, grabbing my own plate.

She hears the disbelief in my voice and points her finger at me. “I’m making you go there one day. You’re going to eat your words.” She uses her fork to point back at her plate. “This is amazing, and I’m not going to lie and say Mama Sofia’s is better, but it’s at least equal, and their garlic bread is to die for. I’m going to have you eating your words.”

“Whatever you say, *principessa*.” My words are still laced with doubt, and I can tell it annoys her. “Aside from Lucia, *Mangia Bene* has the best Italian food in the whole damn city.”

She wrinkles her nose in disgust. “That fancy-pants place? Please, they’re all show and no substance.”

I bark out at laugh at the audacity. “It’s my favorite restaurant, and as an Italian, I can tell you the food is exceptional. The best I’ve had outside of my own kitchen and Italy.”

“What does *mangia bene* even mean? Is that Italian for mediocre, overpriced food?”

The corner of my mouth lifts up at her sassy tone. “It’s from a very common Italian phrase, *Mangia bene, ridi spesso, ama molto*. It means eat well, laugh often, love much.”

“Is that your life’s motto?”

I laugh before I can stop it. “Yeah, that’s me in a nutshell.”

The truth is I’ve smiled and laughed more around Natalya than I think I ever have in my life. She makes me forget everything. All the stress of my family and work and the pain of losing my sister so many years ago, it all fades away when I’m near her. She makes me feel alive and that life is worth living instead of just something you endure.

“I think my life’s motto has been more *have another drink and maybe tomorrow will be better.*”

Instead of giving me one of her easy laughs, she reaches over and squeezes my hand. “I’m sorry, Dominic. I’m sorry you’ve been so alone. My family can be overbearing and way too protective, but I can’t imagine not having them. I hope you know that you can always call me if you’re feeling lonely.” She gives me a soft smile. “Even if it’s just to argue about which Italian restaurant is best.”

I squeeze her hand back, touched by her sweetness. Women don’t selflessly give themselves to me like this, they always want something in return, but the innocent look in Natalya’s eyes makes it clear that she’s not expecting anything in return.

Reaching up, I run my finger lightly along her jaw, feeling my heart speed up when she parts her lips for me. I can’t resist dragging the pad of my thumb along her full, upper lip.

“I love that your top lip is slightly bigger than your bottom one. Do you have any idea how sexy that is?”

Her body gives a soft shudder. “No,” she whispers, and the same shudder runs through me when I feel the heat of her breath on my skin.

“Natalya.”

“Yes?”

“Be a good girl and eat your supper.”

Her pupils dilate at the *good girl* comment, but then disappointment floods them when I pull back and gently push her plate closer. I fill my own

fork, forcing myself to eat the pasta instead of the beautiful, young woman sitting inches away from me.

I can tell she wants to argue with me, but her good sense and empty stomach win in the end. I try and hide my smirk when she takes a large bite of pasta, but she sees it and mutters something in Russian around her full mouth.

“What was that?”

“Nothing.” Her brows raise while she tries so damn hard to appear clueless, but there’s a smile playing at her lips. I wonder if she has any idea how goddamn beautiful she is.

“I might need to learn Russian.”

“And maybe I’ll learn Italian.”

I give her a big smile, because the thought of her speaking my native tongue does things to me.

We spend the next several minutes in comfortable silence while we eat until she lets out a groan and pushes her nearly empty plate away.

“I can’t. No more.” She gives a dramatic flop back against the pillows.

“But you still have dessert,” I remind her.

She groans like she’s in pain and curls into a ball, hugging one of the pillows to her chest. “I can’t do it. Please tell her it was delicious and I’m sorry, but I can’t take another bite.”

“I’ll leave it up here. Maybe you’ll change your mind in a few minutes.”

I finish the last few bites of my own food and stack our plates before putting the tray back on the dresser. I grab the bottle of whiskey I keep in here and a glass, pouring myself a generous drink while I check my phone.

“Any news?”

I look over at her, enjoying the sight of her on my bed while I say, “No. No one’s found anything yet. One of my men brought your bag over, though. I can bring it up now if you want to change into your own clothes.”

She’s quiet for a few seconds, snuggling deeper into my bed. “Do you mind if I keep wearing yours?”

“Not at all. My home is yours for as long as you need it, *principessa*. You can help yourself to whatever you want.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Of course,” I say before I can think better of it.

The mischievous glint in her eyes has me regretting my words. She waves me over and then pats the bed. I take a long drink while walking

closer like there's an invisible thread connecting us and I'm powerless to break it.

"Will you sit with me?"

Against all my better judgement, I sit down, propping my back against the padded headboard. She doesn't waste any time. In seconds, she's flipped over onto her other side and snuggled her body up close to mine, resting her head on my chest and hiking one leg over mine. Fuck, she fits me perfectly. I quickly down the rest of my drink and set the glass on the nightstand. I should push her away, but I don't. I wrap my arms around her small body and pull her even closer. Her arm wraps around my chest in a hug, her head rests on my shoulder, her face close enough for me to feel the heat of her breath on my neck, and her thigh reaches up even higher, flush against my waist as her pussy presses into my side.

It's pure fucking heaven, even though we both know it's nothing but sin.

"Natalya," I start to say, but she cuts me off by squeezing me tighter and kissing the side of my neck.

"My dad asked you to take care of me, Dominic. That's all you're doing."

"I'm pretty sure this is not at all what he had in mind, *principessa*, and we both know it."

Her small shoulders lift in a shrug. "It's been one hell of a night, and I need comforting. You're making me feel safe again. Please don't make me lay in your giant bed all by myself."

I run my hand along her back and shoulder, dragging my fingers along the bare skin of her arms and then tracing the same path back up, mesmerized by the feel of her. My eyes stray to the large picture of Bernini's sculpture. I understand Hades in a new way now. All my instincts are telling me to keep Natalya in my arms, no matter what, and to never let her go.

I hold her, lightly stroking her skin until I'm convinced she's seconds away from sleep. I'm waiting for her body to go limp and for her breathing to slow down and even out, but instead I feel a wet tongue on my neck.

"Fuck," I growl as she lets out a soft sigh and runs her curious tongue along the crook of my neck like she's trying to memorize every detail. "Natalya, you have to stop."

As much as I want to make it sound like a command, it comes out as more of a plea. I'm only so fucking strong around her, and she's wearing

down my defenses faster than I ever thought possible. I'm pleading for mercy, but she's evidently not in a merciful mood. Like a woman possessed, she grips my shoulders and positions her body on top of mine. Even with the sweats on, I can feel her pussy press against my abs, and when she uses my chest for leverage and lifts up, the pure, raw need in her eyes takes my damn breath away.

"*Principessa*," I say, cupping her face and trying like hell to be rational for the both of us. "We're about to cross a line that can't be uncrossed."

"I think maybe we crossed that line two weeks ago when I fell back against you and felt your hard cock digging into my ass."

"We've stepped on the line, maybe put a damn foot over it, but we haven't crossed it. Not yet anyway."

"I don't understand what you do to me." The breathy whisper of her words has me clenching my jaw to keep from closing the distance to kiss her like I want. She leans closer, fingers digging into my shoulders, hips softly starting to rock. "I've never felt this way about anyone, Dominic, and I don't know how to make it stop."

She leans closer so her lips are hovering right above mine, so close I could stick my tongue out and taste her.

"Make it stop," she begs, rocking her hips even harder, trying her damndest to grind against me as I feel my resolve melt away.

"Are you trying to use my body to get yourself off, *principessa*?" I dart my tongue out, giving her top lip a hint of a lick, smiling at the whimper she gives. "Tell me, sweetheart, does your pussy ache for me?"

I grab onto her hips, grinding her harder against me. The surprised gasp she gives is sexy as fuck.

"Yes, god yes."

Her hands move to my face, palms splayed out on either side as she leans closer. I tighten my fingers around her hips, holding her still. I wait until her heavy-lidded eyes find mine.

"I can make you feel better, *principessa*, but I can't give you any more than that." I grind her against me as I rock my hips up, letting her feel a small taste of what I'm offering. "I can take that ache from you, if you want me too, but I can't fuck you."

The hurt look on her face is like a vise around my heart, but I don't give in. I can't take her virginity. I just fucking can't. I'm already crossing a line

that never should've been crossed. I'm breaking enough moral rules tonight. I don't need to add to it.

I bring her attention back to what I'm offering with another slow rock of my hips. "Do you want me to make you feel better?"

She nods her head and lets out a breathy "yes," and that's all the invitation I need. Cupping the back of her head, I lace my fingers in her dark hair and ghost my lips over hers.

"I've thought about kissing you so many damn times, about tasting those full lips and feeling your body pressed against mine."

She moans and rocks her hips, grinding shamelessly against my stomach.

"I've thought about fucking you in so many different ways, *principessa*. It's all I can think about."

I confess my sins against her lips, but I'm not hoping for forgiveness or wanting absolution. I don't give a fuck about any of that. All I want is her. I want her beneath me, me inside her, her screaming my name and clenching that tight pussy around my cock. I want to mark her as mine in every conceivable way, and I never want to let her go.

Knowing I can't have any of that pulls a pained groan from me right before I press my lips to hers and kiss her for the first time. I swallow her whimper, parting her lips with my tongue and delving inside for more, knowing it will never be enough. She keeps her hands on my face, surrounding me with her presence as she rocks harder against me. I kiss her slowly and deeply, savoring every second of the time I have with her, and when she lets out a frustrated groan at her inability to get herself off, I smile against her lips.

"I love feeling you grind against me, baby, but I'm going to be the one to get you off."

I give her top lip a soft suck and squeeze her hip while I drag my thumb along her inner thigh, dipping low enough to stroke one of her pussy lips. I'd give anything to slide my hand down her pants and feel her bare, slick folds against my hand, but I know if I do that, then there's no way in hell I'll be able to resist sliding into her.

"Dominic," she whimpers into our kiss, bringing one of her hands to the back of my neck to clutch me tighter.

I slide my thumb along her pussy, running up her slit until I find what I'm looking for. She breaks our kiss on a gasp when I give her a firm rub.

“Jesus,” she pants, making me smile.

I give her a wink. “Not quite.”

The smile she gives me lights up her whole face, and I can’t help but tell her exactly what I’m thinking.

“You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.” I kiss her again, murmuring against her lips, “So fucking stunning it takes my damn breath away.”

I rub her faster, knowing it’s not going to take her long. She lets out another whimper, furrowing her brows and blushing even deeper. I can feel her getting shy on me, and I don’t like it. When she tries to duck her head, I press the pad of my thumb firmly against her, refusing to rub her like she needs me to.

Her eyes are filled with confusion when she looks up at me.

“Don’t hide yourself from me.” Leaning closer, I give her top lip another suck. “I don’t ever want you to hide any part of yourself from me. I want it all. Don’t hide and don’t fight what I’m trying to give you.”

She nods her head, letting out a whimper of pure need when I slowly circle her clit, teasing her until her breaths are soft, little pants and her thighs are shaking. “Come for me, *principessa*. Give me what I want.”

Her fingers grip the back of my hair when I rub her harder. I kiss her slowly, bringing her closer and closer to the edge, and right before she comes, I wrap my fingers around her slender neck and pull her back so I can see her face when the orgasm hits her. Her heart races beneath my thumb while my other hand keeps working her. Her beautiful eyes widen and then go glassy and heavy-lidded as she moans my name and rocks her hips, increasing the friction and her pleasure.

She looks like the perfect mix of innocence and pure sin, and I swear all it would take is one touch of her hand on my cock and I’d be joining her, coming in my pants like a fucking teenager.

“Fuck,” I growl in Italian, tightening my grip on her neck and pulling her close again so I can kiss her. With my thumb still rubbing her clit in soft circles, I slide my tongue between her lips, needing to taste her again. Her body shudders against mine with her aftershocks, and when she becomes too sensitive and tries to squirm away, I smile against her lips and gentle my touch, stroking her softly until she melts in my arms.

God, I really should not have done this. Letting go of her is going to be hard enough, but how the fuck am I supposed to do it after knowing what

my name sounds like spilling from her lips as she comes?

I've just made things a million times harder on myself, but even knowing that doesn't make me push her from my arms.

If anything, I hold her tighter, wishing like hell I could keep her for myself.

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Chapter 8

Natalya

S lumped against Dominic's hard chest, I try to muster up the strength to move, but I can't. He's stuck with me in his lap for the foreseeable future, and he doesn't seem to mind. His arms are wrapped around me, holding me tight while his fingers run through my hair and he whispers something in Italian that sounds just as beautiful as he is. Everything about this man is perfect. Well, except for the tiny detail that he's friends with my dad and a wee bit forbidden. Aside from that, he's fucking perfect.

With my belly full and my body still humming with pleasure from the orgasm he just gave me, I lose the strength to keep my eyes open. He feels me soften even more and kisses the top of my head.

"Go to sleep, *principessa*. I'll watch over you and make sure you're safe."

I snuggle in deeper, never wanting to leave the warmth of his body. I know he'll do what he says and that there's nowhere safer I could be.

"Thanks for taking care of me, Dominic," I whisper, seconds away from sleep.

"You can always come to me, Natalya. I will always be here for you, *principessa*."

His fingers run through my hair, calming me in a way I hadn't thought possible. I feel completely at peace, and for the first time since seeing him at the farmhouse, I fall asleep easily, without a care in the world.

The next morning I wake to an empty bed and enough sunlight in the room to let me know I've overslept. Stretching my arms and legs, I smile at the memory of last night. Dominic had unknowingly given me my first kiss and my first orgasm that didn't involve just me and my imagination. I had

no idea anything could feel that good. I know how to bring myself pleasure, and up until last night I always thought I was pretty damn good at it, but he took things to another level, one that I hadn't even known existed.

At some point he must've tucked me under the covers and when I sit up, I see the bag my sister packed for me in the corner and a new tray of food waiting for me on the dresser. As stuffed as I'd been last night, I'm famished now and the thought of more of Lucia's cooking has me pushing back the covers and hopping out of bed. I nearly groan when I see the kettle of coffee and quickly pour myself a cup. It's still steamy hot, and after I put in a healthy dose of sugar and cream, I take a big drink and look at the rest of the tray.

"Damn," I whisper, eyeing the homemade croissants. Taking the biggest one from the plate, I bite into it and groan my appreciation. It's filled with strawberry jam and it melts in my damn mouth. A girl could get used to this. I don't even bother sitting down. I just stand by the window that looks out onto his lush lawn and finish my croissant and coffee. Even though his house is in the city, it still feels private. The entire property is gated, and as I watch, I see several guards walking around, making sure everything is secure. I can't see any weapons, but I know they're armed.

Pouring myself one more cup of coffee, I grab my bag and head for the bathroom. I love wearing Dominic's clothes, but I want to look nice for him when I see him again. My bandaged feet are barely sore today thanks to him, and when I peek under the band-aids, nothing looks infected or inflamed, so I decide to chance a shower.

Digging through my bag, I send a silent thanks to Mia for packing everything I could possibly need. She even threw in my favorite summer dress and sandals. After brushing my teeth, I strip down and then step into his ridiculously huge shower. My first thought is that it could hold four people easily, and then my second thought is a completely unwanted visual of Dominic in here with several women. It's the last thing I want to think about, but once it pops in my head, I can't stop thinking about it. He's forty-three. There's no way in hell he's been living a celibate life, and that adds up to a fuck-ton of women, and Dominic is insanely gorgeous, so that means the women he's been with have probably been just as good looking. It's a bitter pill to swallow, and suddenly those two cups of coffee and huge croissant aren't feeling so great as they swirl around while I worry myself into a stomachache.

The pep in my step is gone, and not even the comforting, familiar scent of his body wash can pull me out of my funk. Last night had been special to me, amazing and life-changing even, but it had probably been nothing to him. I mean, he hadn't even gotten to come. God, he must think I'm pathetic, the sad virgin that he got off while we were both fully clothed. Exciting times for him, I'm sure.

I get dressed in my favorite pink sundress, hoping it might help cheer me up, and brush out my hair without bothering to search for a blowdryer. Leaving my feet bare since they're no longer bleeding, I leave the bathroom and grab my phone. I'd texted Svetlana while I'd been in the tub, and it looks like she's blown up my phone with texts. I'm not in the mood to talk about what happened last night, so I send off a quick text, letting her know I'll tell her everything as soon as I can. My mom and dad also texted me, asking me how I am and letting me know that Grigori is out of surgery and doing okay but that he'll have to remain there for a while. The bullets did a lot of damage and the surgery to fix him wasn't an easy one.

I send them a quick text to let them know I'm fine and not to worry. My dad's text is immediate.

Do you want to come home? Did you sleep okay? Is Dominic taking care of you?

I bite my lip and choose my words carefully.

I slept fine, Dad. Stop worrying! :) If it's okay I'd rather stay here until we know for sure what's going on.

I'm paranoid about sounding too eager to stay with Dominic, so I add, *I really like Lucia. She's been cooking me some amazing Italian food. Yes, Dominic is making sure I have everything I need. I haven't seen too much of him. I think he might be in his office.*

I know I'm fudging the truth, and I hate doing it, but I can't tell him his friend gave me a mind-blowing orgasm before holding me while I fell asleep. Something tells me that wouldn't go over so well. As soon as his text comes in, I read it while my heart races.

I'll never stop worrying, princess. I'm your dad. It's what I do. :) I'm okay with you staying there for a while longer, but let me know if you change your mind. I love you, sweetheart. It doesn't feel the same without you here.

I send out a quick reply. *Miss you all, too, Dad. Love you.*

I toss my phone on the bed and swallow down the guilt I feel. I reason with myself that my dad would hate any guy that I like. He doesn't want to lose me, but as much as I love my family, I can't ignore the pull Dominic has on me. I can't explain it, but I know I want to explore it. Last night meant something to me, and I have to know if it meant something to him too.

Knowing I might get my heart torn into a million pieces, I leave the safety of his room and go in search of him. The large, gorgeous house is quiet as I walk down the hall and then make my way down the stairs. I remember the way to his office, so with quick steps I silently make my way towards the set of closed doors at the end of the hall. The wood is the same dark color as the floor, and I can't help but feel intimidated when I raise my hand to knock. Everything about this room screams power and dominance—two words that fit Dominic Alessi perfectly.

I hear his voice, but whatever he says is in Italian, so I have no clue if he's telling me to come in or go the fuck away. I take a gamble and open the door, hoping like hell it's the first one. He lifts his head like he's surprised the door's opened, which means guess number two was the correct one, but as soon as he sees it's me, the corner of his mouth lifts up in a smile and all I can do is stare at the gorgeous Italian in front of me.

Sitting back in his chair, his eyes run over me before he tells me to shut the door and then motions for me to come closer. He's still in the same suit from last night, and his hair is a bit messy like he's scrubbed his hand through it one too many times. He looks tired and worried, but still so mouthwateringly sexy that I can't look away. Small espresso cups litter his desk, and as soon as I'm close enough, I cup his cheek, running my thumb over the stubble that's even thicker than it was last night. God, I bet he could grow a beard in record time, and as much as I love his smooth face, there's no denying he looks sexy as fuck with a few days' worth of growth.

"Did you get any sleep at all?"

The corner of his mouth curves up even more at my question and the hint of worry in my voice.

He ignores my question. "Did you eat breakfast?"

"I did, thank you for bringing it up. The croissants were amazing."

"*Cornetti*," he corrects. "I'm Italian, *principessa*, not French."

"*Cornetti*," I say, testing the word out.

He smiles at my pronunciation and reaches up to run his thumb over my lips. "I love hearing you speak my language."

My lips part at his touch, and memories of last night come rushing in, reminding me of what we'd done and of the pleasure he'd given me. His dark eyes study me, taking in every detail and reading me so goddamn easily. The pained expression on his face lets me know I'm not going to like what he's about to say.

"Natalya, I should never have let things go so far last night."

I'm already shaking my head before he's even finished the sentence. "No, don't say that."

"I'm more than twice your age," he reminds me like there's a possibility I might have forgotten, "and I have a working relationship with your dad and we've become friends over the years."

He sighs and grabs my waist, pulling me closer and resting his forehead against my chest, right below my breasts.

"This can't happen," he whispers. "It would be different if you just wanted to fuck me, *principessa*, but that's not what this is, and we both know it."

I run my hand through his thick, dark hair. "Would you?" I ask. "If that's all I wanted?"

He lifts his head just enough to look up at me. "Is that all you want from me?"

I swear if I didn't know any better, I'd think he sounded hurt, but there's no way in hell that can be true. The don of the Alessi Mafia can't possibly be hurt by the idea of me only wanting one night with him. The idea is so preposterous that I almost laugh. He sees the amusement in my eyes and his narrow in confusion.

"This is funny to you?"

"The idea that you could possibly be hurt by the idea that I might just want sex is very amusing to me, yes. You're Dominic Alessi, Italian sex god come to life, and I'm just me."

He lets out a soft laugh at my comment. "Italian sex god, huh?"

I shrug my shoulders. "I made an educated guess based on last night."

He holds me tighter and closes his eyes while he lets out a masculine groan. "God, you'd looked so fucking sexy coming on my lap. And, Natalya," he says, opening his eyes and waiting for me to meet his gaze, "you will never only be *just* you."

I brush his messed-up hair off his forehead, dragging my nails along his scalp as his eyes darken even more. He's right about what he said. Our being together feels impossible, but I can't deny the pull I feel towards him. I want him, and I know he wants me. Cupping his face, I lower down so we're almost touching.

"Do you want me?"

"You know I do," he whispers against my lips. "It's all I can fucking think about, but just because I want something doesn't mean I can have it."

"But I'm offering myself to you. I'm yours for the taking."

He groans and digs his fingers into my waist, pulling me closer. "Don't say that to me, *principessa*."

I can tell he's fighting his feelings for me. He's trying to do what he thinks is right, and his nerves are on edge because of it. He hasn't eaten or slept or even bothered to change clothes. He's wound so tight he's going to snap at any second, and I'm worried about him. The line of work he's in doesn't allow for mistakes, and the last thing I want is for him to get hurt. I want to take care of him, but I can tell by the stubborn way he's clenching his jaw that I'm about to get a glimpse of the famous Italian temper if I push him too hard.

He watches me with wary eyes as I lower myself, sinking to my knees in front of him. With my hands on his thighs, I look up at him. "I want to make you feel better."

Cupping my face, he runs his thumb over my lips. "You do, just by being near me, you do."

I lean into his touch and slowly slide my hands up his powerful thighs. I feel the muscles tighten under my hands as he sucks in a breath.

"Natalya," he warns, but I ignore him, stopping my hand right before it hits the obvious bulge in his suit pants. Jesus, this man's huge. He strains against the fabric, and there's nothing in the world that could keep me from inching my fingers closer and touching him. My lips part in surprise when I run my thumb over his head, feeling the shape and thickness of him. He hisses out something in Italian, but I'm too mesmerized by his cock to look away. I'm greedy to know every inch of him. My fingers run up his length, trailing along the top and sides, constructing an image in my mind and wanting to brand it there.

"More," I whisper, looking up at him. "I want to see more."

His jaws grind together, and the vein in his neck is trailing an obvious line down his throat. "No."

The word is a harsh whisper, and I don't like it, so I ignore him and bring my head lower, pressing a kiss to the head of his cock. My reward is another fast string of Italian as his fingers weave into my hair before he tightens his grip and lifts my face up.

"I'm trying to do the right thing here."

"No," I correct him. "You're trying to do what *you* think is right without taking my opinion into consideration at all."

"So you think it's right for me to pull my cock out and slide it between your pouty lips? You think that's the appropriate thing to do?"

I give him a small smirk. "Yes, I do. You made me feel good last night, and I can see how stressed you are. Let me make you feel good, Dominic. Please."

He's at war with himself, I see it so clearly on his face, but when I lower my head again and wrap my lips around his head as best I can and give him a soft squeeze, he groans and lets go of my hair so he can undo his pants.

"I'm going straight to hell for this," he mutters.

I give his head another kiss. "Would it be worth it?"

His face softens when he cups my cheek and looks down at me. "Yes, *principessa*, it would be worth it. I'd suffer a thousand hells for just one touch from you."

It's impossible for me to hide my smile, and when he sees it, he gives me another sexy wink before slowly pulling his cock out.

"Jesus," I whisper, because even though I felt like I'd just memorized it with my fingers, the reality of him is even bigger than what I'd concocted in my mind. Thanks to the internet, this isn't the first dick I've seen, but it's the first one I've seen in person, and he's way bigger than anything I've seen online.

My eyes widen as I take in the size of him, and when I hear a soft laugh, I look up to see a pleased and amused grin playing at his lips.

"It's bigger than I thought it'd be," I admit.

"You felt me through my pants," he reminds me.

"Not the same thing." I reach a shaky hand out and as soon as my fingers hit his shaft, his cock jerks and he hisses out a breath. Worried, I look back up at him. "Did that hurt?"

"Fuck no it didn't. Touch me again."

I smile at how thick his accent is and bring my fingers back to him. The heat of his skin radiates off him and into me, and when I trace one of the veins that runs up the length of his shaft, I see a bead of pre-cum appear.

Suddenly ravenous, I close the distance and wrap my lips around his head while dragging my tongue along his slit.

“Jesus fuck,” he growls, threading his fingers in my hair.

I have no idea what I’m doing, so I let instinct take over. I run my tongue over him again, swirling it around his head before giving him a hard enough suck to hollow out my cheeks. His deep, masculine groan fills me with a ridiculous amount of pride.

“Keep sucking, *principessa*, just like that.”

Digging my fingers into his thighs, I lower myself onto him as much as I can. There’s no way in hell I can take all of him in, so I don’t even bother trying. I focus on the top half of his cock, sucking and licking and kissing him until spit is dripping from my lips, coating his entire shaft and puddling at the base.

“I want to feel that small hand of yours around my dick, Natalya, right fucking now,” he growls out.

Bringing one of my hands to him, I wrap my fingers around his thick shaft as best I can.

“Tighter.”

I tighten my grip, grateful for his instructions. I want to make him feel good, but I’ve never done this before, and I need the help.

“Good girl, now stroke me, *principessa*.”

I slowly start to stroke him, gripping him tightly as I bring my hand up and down while I suck on his head. After a few seconds, I find my rhythm, timing my hand with my sucking so I’m working him in tandem.

“Fuck, baby,” he groans, fisting my hair even tighter. “I’m so fucking close.” His hips rock in the chair, thrusting up to fill my mouth even more. “Be a good girl and take what I give you. I’m going to kiss you after this, and I better be able to taste my cum on your tongue.”

God, this man’s dirty talk is going to be the end of me. All my focus is on giving him pleasure, but I can feel how wet my panties are, and I know it wouldn’t take much to send me over the edge.

I suck him harder, moaning against him when he growls my name and his hips thrust up even harder before his whole body shudders and the wet heat of his release hits my mouth. Surprised by the new sensation, I pause

for just a second before his cock jerks inside me again, shooting more of his seed to the back of my throat. Raspy Italian fills my ears as I suck harder, drunk on the feel and taste of him, on knowing that *I'm* the one to pull those deep groans from him and that it was my name on his tongue as he came so hard he forgot his English.

Even after he starts to soften, I rest the side of my face on his thigh and keep gently sucking him, not ready to break contact. His fingers run through my hair while he gets his breathing under control. Bringing his other hand to my cheek, he softly caresses my stretched-out lips that are still locked around him.

“You’re perfect, *principessa*, so fucking perfect.”

I flick my tongue along the underside of his cock and give him another soft suck. He lets out another sexy groan and then an annoyed one when his phone starts to ring. Reaching for it, he lets out a heavy sigh.

“It’s your dad,” he says, freezing me in place.

The phone keeps ringing while he waits for me to let him go, but I don’t. I know I should, but for reasons I can’t explain, I just don’t. He’s mine, and I can block out who he’s talking to if he can. It’s not like he’s in the same room as us.

“You sure about this, *principessa*?”

“Mm-hmm,” I moan.

He answers the phone while running his finger over my lip again. “Hey, Lev.” He sounds so casual. No one would ever suspect that my mouth was wrapped around his cock right now. “No, everything’s fine. She probably just left her phone in the room.”

Dominic feels me tense when I realize my dad must’ve been trying to call me and then got worried when I didn’t answer. His finger strokes my lip and cheek while my body relaxes against him.

“She’s doing fine,” Dominic says, and then adds, “I’m taking good care of her.”

The corner of my mouth fights a grin, but he sees it anyway and caresses it with his thumb. I’m glad I can only hear one side of the conversation. It makes it easier to pretend he’s not talking to my dad while I still have his dick in my mouth.

“My men haven’t heard anything yet, but we will. I’ve sent out extra guys, and I told them not to hold back. If there’s anything for them to find, trust me, they’ll find it.”

I can hear the fury in his voice when he adds, "I take this just as personally as you do. This happened in my territory, and I see it as a direct attack on what's mine."

My eyes lift up at his words, meeting his dark eyes. He gives me an easy grin and then gives me a playful eye roll as he says, "Yes, I realize she's not my daughter. That's not what I meant, and you damn well know it. I just want you to know that I'm putting everything into this, and we will find the fucker who did it. You have my word on that. For now, she's safe. Nothing can hurt her while she's here. I won't allow it."

With his cock only semi-hard, I'm able to take more of him in, so I slide down, filling my mouth with him. His eyes widen ever so slightly as he watches me. He gives my cheek a soft warning tap, and I give him a good suck in return. His nostrils flare as he takes in a breath, and when I slip my hand under his shirt to rest it on his hard abs, he gives me a wink that makes my heart skip a beat.

He talks for a few more minutes, and I rest with my head in his lap, lazily sucking on his cock. It's oddly relaxing, and when my eyes start to fall shut, I don't fight it. His fingers alternate between stroking my lips and cheek and running through my hair and the sensations are downright euphoric. Everything this man does is orgasmic. He's effortlessly sexy in a way that constantly makes me want to roll onto my back and spread my legs for him.

I hear him say goodbye and set his phone down, but I keep my eyes closed and give him another soft suck.

"Are you aware of what you're doing, *principessa*?"

I crack my eyes open. "Hmm?"

He smiles and strokes my cheek. "Do you realize what you're doing?"

I give him a look that must clearly say, *Duh, I'm sucking your cock*, because he lets out a soft laugh and taps my cheek again.

"It's called cock warming, Natalya. Your sweet mouth is keeping me warm, just holding me without trying to get me off. It's insanely erotic, and you did it without even thinking about it."

I've never heard of cock warming before, and when I make no move to get up, he gives me an approving smile and strokes my cheek again.

"You want to keep doing it?"

"Mm-hmm," I moan, still not ready to break our connection.

“Good girl,” he murmurs, and I feel that praise in every cell of my body. I think I’d be willing to do just about anything if it got me a *good girl* in that sexy Italian accent of his.

“I need to make a few phone calls, and I want you to stay right where you are.”

I give a soft nod and then close my eyes again when he grabs his phone. This time the conversation is in fast Italian, making it easy for me to tune everything out and sink even deeper into the comforting, almost meditative zone this is putting me into. He keeps stroking my face and hair, and I settle into him, scooting a bit closer so I can rest my butt on my heels.

He stays in my mouth, even as a slight ache starts to form in my jaw, and I keep my lips wrapped around him. I give him the occasional suck, but mostly I just hold him, keeping our bodies connected until I start to get drowsy, even though I know I can’t possibly be tired. I would’ve thought it was impossible to fall asleep with a dick in my mouth, but I must because the next thing I know, Dominic is stroking my cheek and whispering my name.

“Hmm?” I moan, still feeling disoriented. He’s gotten bigger, and as he’s grown, I’ve slipped further down so it’s just his thick head between my lips now.

“You fell asleep, *principessa*, while softly sucking on my cock.”

I hear the awe in his voice and smile around him.

“I was supposed to be getting work done, but I couldn’t take my eyes off you.” He lets out a heavy sigh while running the pad of one finger along my jaw. “It kills me that I can’t keep you for myself.”

Before I can argue and tell him that he most certainly can, he’s reaching down and lifting me up like I weigh nothing and sitting my ass on the desk in front of him. Strong arms wrap around me, pulling me right to the edge as he scoots his chair closer so he’s positioned between my thighs. Resting his head against my chest, he drags his nose along the curve of my breast, inhaling deeply as he goes.

“I know you’re innocent, sweetheart, but I need you to tell me how innocent.”

I run a hand through the thick hair I’ll never be able to get enough of and press a kiss to his forehead. “I’ve never gotten on my knees and cock-warmed anyone before.”

His laugh vibrates against my chest, and it sounds so carefree and in complete contrast to the tough, hardened mafia boss he is. I like hearing it. I like seeing this side of him.

“I’m glad to hear that. What else haven’t you done?”

I sigh and keep running my fingers through his hair. “My family is very protective, and you know I didn’t have a normal childhood. Bodyguards have been watching me since I was born. The night Svetlana and I snuck out and went to your club, that’s the first time we’ve ever been alone without at least one set of eyes watching us.”

“I was watching you,” he reminds me, lifting his dark eyes to mine. “I couldn’t take my fucking eyes off you, *principessa*.”

He takes another inhale, like he’s trying to consume every part of me he can get and then kisses the curve of my breast again.

“Surely there were boys at school,” he murmurs against my chest. “Hidden moments in high school where the bodyguards couldn’t see you.”

I could lie and make myself sound a bit cooler and more experienced, but I don’t think I could ever lie to this man, so I answer honestly. “I never wanted any of them.”

Sliding his hand behind my neck, he curls his fingers around me, pulling me down so our lips are almost touching.

“Are you telling me you’ve never done anything at all, *principessa*?”

“Yes,” I whisper.

“And yet you got on your knees for me?” He ghosts his lips over mine, that one small move setting my body on fire. “So innocent and yet you came on me, rocking your little body and using me until you were so wet your juices soaked through your pants and onto my shirt?”

My face heats up at how brazen I’d been.

“Yes,” I manage to whisper.

“Are you telling me that I gave you your first kiss last night and your first orgasm?”

“First orgasm from someone else, yes,” I clarify, not wanting him to think I’m that fucking innocent.

The sexy grin that lights up his face is downright stunning. The corners of his eyes crinkle just enough to remind me how much older he is than me, and that probably shouldn’t turn me on as much as it does.

“You like to make yourself come, *principessa*?”

When he sees how embarrassed I'm getting, he tightens his grip on my neck and slowly laps at my top lip, licking it and gently tugging it between his teeth.

"Don't ever be embarrassed with me, Natalya, not with me." The heat of his breath on my lips has goosebumps rising all over my body. "I said I wanted to taste my cum on your tongue." He gives my lip a soft bite. "Stick your tongue out for me."

When I hesitate, he gives me another bite, this one just a tiny bit harder. His hand grips my neck while the other one runs down my spine to rest against my lower back, holding me firmly in place. I cup his face and stick my tongue out. He lets out a sexy, deep groan and latches onto my tongue, slowly sucking me into the wet heat of his mouth until our lips are pressed together. He sucks my tongue, cleaning me of his taste. I feel his jaws working beneath my fingers, and just when I think I can't take a second more of this sweet torture, he lets my tongue go so he can kiss me.

The kiss is hard and hungry and if I didn't know any better, I'd say it was a claiming kind of kiss, like he's trying to mark what's his, branding me with his mouth so that I'll always taste like him and every man who sees me will instinctively know that I belong to Dominic.

He delves in deeper while grabbing one of my hands and bringing it between us. With his hand on top of mine and our fingers laced together, he guides my hand along my inner thigh and up my dress until the tips of our fingers are hitting the soaked piece of fabric between my thighs.

"Show me how you touch yourself," he growls as he kisses me. "I want to see what you've always done in the dark. Show me the hidden Natalya, the one part of yourself you've always kept hidden like a dirty little secret, because there are no secrets between us, *principessa*. I want it all."

Roughly pushing my panties aside, he groans and kisses me harder while dragging my fingers up my soaking wet slit. I'm fucking drenched for him, dripping onto our entwined fingers, and when he runs the pad of my finger over my clit, I rock my hips and let out a whimper. I feel him smile against my lips, urging me with his hand to keep going, and with his tongue sliding along mine and our wet, slippery fingers mixed together, it's easy for me to let go and touch myself like I've always done in private. He makes me want to show him things that I've never shown or shared with anyone else.

“That’s my good girl,” he says in a ragged whisper against my lips, feeling my fingers as I start to work myself. “I better have a fucking puddle on my desk when you’re done.”

He grabs the back of my dress, yanking it up and then hooking his fingers into my panties before pulling them off me so quickly I barely have time to register what he’s doing. My bare ass is flush against the hard wood of his desk and less than a second later his soaked hand is intertwined with mine while I rub my clit in slow circles, taking his fingers with me.

“So fucking beautiful.” He’s fisting my dress with his free hand, holding it up so there isn’t anything obstructing his view. I look down, barely recognizing myself. My thighs are spread, my hips are rocking in a seductive rhythm, and my fingers are greedily rubbing my clit, bringing myself closer and closer to the release I so desperately need. He hasn’t tucked his cock away yet, and it’s jutting out from his pants, fully hard and covered in pre-cum. Our bodies feel dangerously close to one another, a temptation that we’re both so close to giving into.

His dark eyes stay locked on my pussy, and when he lowers his head to kiss my inner thigh, I moan his name and watch in fascination as he slowly kisses his way closer to where our fingers are. I’ve never been so turned on in my life. Using my free hand, I thread my fingers into his hair, holding onto him and gasping when he’s close enough to run his tongue up my slit and over our fingers.

“Dominic,” I moan, entranced by the erotic sight of his tongue on my pussy, lapping up my juices like he’ll never be able to get enough.

His dark eyes lift to mine, holding my gaze while giving me another slow lick. “I’m going to fuck you with my tongue while you rub your little clit, and then you’re going to come all over my face. I want to be covered in you. I want to taste you and smell you all fucking day.”

Panting, I quickly nod my head, wanting every damn thing he’s offering. With dark, hooded eyes, he runs a hand up my stomach, gently applying pressure so I’m forced onto my back, taking up his entire desk. I hear something fall to the ground, but neither one of us stops to see what it is. Palming the back of my thigh, he pushes my leg up and out, spreading me so wide that my folds part for him, exposing every inch of my wet pussy to his hungry gaze.

“Goddamn,” he growls, taking in the sight of me splayed open before him. “Mine.”

The word is spoken so low and deep that I almost miss it, but then he growls it again before dipping his tongue inside me. I gasp and arch my lower back off his desk, stunned by the sensations running through me. His wet fingers nudge mine, reminding me what I'm supposed to be doing, and as soon as I start to rub my clit again, I feel how close I am. I'm swollen and ready, and with his tongue running along my inner walls, I rub harder and push myself over the edge. A quick, shocked scream leaves my lips before I remember where I am and clamp my jaw shut to keep from alerting everyone in the house to what we're doing.

Dominic growls against me, licking and sucking my folds, sending my body spiraling into another orgasm before I've even come down from the first. His breathing is fierce and erratic, and I barely register the rhythmic, wet sounds of him working his own cock. I'm too caught up in my own pleasure. Waves of pure bliss ripple through every part of me until I can't help but let out a soft laugh and collapse against his desk, drained of all energy and completely spent.

He gives me one more long lick, swiping over my overly sensitive clit and filling his mouth with the taste of me as he lets out a deep groan and pulls back seconds before I feel his hand at my hip, holding me tightly while a wet heat hits my pussy. He growls my name while covering me in his cum, and the look in his eyes as he does it is downright feral. This Armani-suited mafia don comes undone for me, letting me see the real man beneath the feared Alessi name. This is the real Dominic—hair messy, chest heaving, pupils blown and eyes heavy-lidded, and a look of absolute adoration on his handsome face.

My Dominic.

The thought comes unbidden into my head, but once it's there, I know it won't be leaving anytime soon. We may not have just fucked in the traditional sense, but we shared something, something that can't and won't be forgotten. We didn't just cross the damn line, we fucking obliterated it. We left it so far behind that it can't even be seen anymore.

He gives me a slow, sexy smile and leans his body over mine so he can kiss me. It's just as passionate as every kiss he gives me, but it's a lazy kiss, an *I'm completely satisfied and happy* kind of kiss. I wrap my arms and legs around him, pulling him closer, and when our lips finally part, we're both panting for air.

“I shouldn’t have done that,” he whispers against my lips, “but you’re impossible to resist, *principessa*.”

“You definitely should’ve done that, and you better do it again soon.”

He lets out an adorable laugh and gives me another kiss before standing back up. He looks down at me and groans. Putting his hands on either thigh, he gently spreads me wide again, eyeing the mess he made on me. With a determined look on his face, he runs a finger along my smooth pussy, covering his finger in cum before very slowly pushing it inside me.

“Fuck,” I gasp. My body clenches around him, gripping him tightly as he slowly slides in. He murmurs in Italian while he fingers me gently, pulling out so he can soak his finger again before slipping back inside. He keeps doing it until I’m clean and my pussy is full. I should be worried. I’m not on birth control, and even though the chances aren’t nearly as high of getting pregnant this way, it does still happen. It’s not completely unheard of. But instead of freaking out and crawling my ass off his desk, I rock my hips, meeting the slow thrusts of his finger.

“God, you’re fucking perfect.” His voice is still more of a growl, accent thicker than usual. “I’ve never felt anything as good as your tight little cunt wrapped around my finger, never tasted anything as good as the way you taste when you come on my tongue, and never once have I ever allowed my sperm inside a woman.”

He groans and gives me one more slow thrust before pulling his finger out and bringing it to my lips, offering it to me. I don’t hesitate. Opening wide, I latch onto him and suck him in. His eyes darken, almost closing in ecstasy as he watches me taste us.

“What the fuck are you doing to me, *principessa*?” he whispers, not understanding this thing between us any more than I do. I just know it’s there, and that there’s no use fighting it.

I’m just about to tell him that when there’s a knock at the door that freezes me in place, and it’s only after I hear someone yelling in Italian and not Russian that I’m able to relax enough to take a breath.

Dominic hollers something back and then gives me an apologetic look before pulling my dress back down. I know we can’t stay in his office all day, but I was hoping for a little more time to get myself together before having to face anyone else. I don’t know how in the hell I’m going to pull off hiding how I’m feeling. I’ve never been good at it, and that’s with little

things, not massive secrets like *Dominic Alessi just made me come with his mouth and then stuffed me full of his sperm* secrets.

He senses my fear and cups my face. “Relax, *principessa*. I don’t know what’s happening between us, but I do know that you have nothing to fear. We’ll figure this out together.” His lips caress mine as he whispers, “You have no idea how much I love knowing that you’re going to be dripping my seed underneath that pretty pink dress.”

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Chapter 9

Dominic

I look down at Natalya's post-orgasm face—flushed cheeks, glassy eyes, messy hair—fully aware that this isn't going at all how I'd planned. I'd thought I could control myself around her, that I could keep her here, safe and untouched, but I'd been so fucking wrong, because I can't keep my damn hands off her. She feels like she's mine, and every instinct I have is telling me to grab onto her and never let go.

I'd shoved my cum into her for fuck's sake, and I'd very nearly fucked her, taking her virginity on my desk like a goddamn animal.

"Dominic, I need to talk to you!"

I groan at the loud string of Italian Alessandro is yelling at me through the door. Cupping Natalya's face, I kiss her one last time. I'm completely addicted to her taste. Her tongue, her pussy, her skin—I can't get enough of her, and I want it all for myself.

"I'm sorry. I have to let him in. He might have some news."

"I understand," she whispers, looking up at me with the warmest expression on her beautiful face. No one looks at me the way she does, so open and trusting and guileless. Her innocence draws me to her, and it's not just that she's a virgin, although I'd be lying if I said I didn't fucking love the fact that I'm the only man to ever touch her, it's more than that. It's a natural sweetness that I've never found in anyone else, and I crave it like my next breath of air.

Pulling back, I tuck my cock back in my pants and straighten my shirt. Natalya quickly puts her panties back on and goes to sit in one of the leather chairs in front of my desk right before I tell Sandro he can come in. The door opens a second later. He walks in, looking irritated at having to wait in

the hall, but as soon as he sees Natalya, his mouth lifts in a grin and he shoots me a very amused look.

“Natalya, this is my cousin Alessandro, but we all call him Sandro. He and his brother, Dario, came back with me from Italy to help me run things.”

She stands and gives him a smile, holding her hand out so they can shake. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Sandro’s grin widens. “It’s very nice to meet you too.” His eyes take in the messy desk and the files and paperweight that I’d forgotten to pick up. “I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

Natalya’s cheeks turn a deeper shade of red, and as adorable as she is when she’s embarrassed, I quickly come to her rescue and tell my cousin, “Of course not. Did you have something to tell me, or did you just decide to knock on my door for no reason?” When he hesitates, I say in Italian, “Sandro, spit it out and then get the fuck out.”

He laughs and looks between the two of us. Sticking with Italian, he says, “You sure this is a good idea, boss? She’s a Melnikov.” He gives another small laugh. “And really fucking young.”

“I didn’t bring you over here for relationship advice. Now tell me what the fuck is going on.”

The amused glint stays in his eyes, but he finally starts talking. “Dario and a few men caught a lead. They’re looking into it now, but he’s pretty confident they’re going to have someone to question soon.”

“Why the fuck didn’t anyone tell me?”

Natalya jumps at the sound of my angry Italian, but I give her a quick smile that Sandro doesn’t miss to let her know everything’s okay.

He lets out another soft laugh. “I texted you several times. Seems you were distracted and missed it.”

Fuck.

I grab my phone from the desk and see all the messages I’d missed. I’d been so focused on Natalya’s sweet pussy that I hadn’t even heard them come in. Now more than ever, I need to get my focus back where it should be. If something happens to her because I’m not doing my job properly, I’ll never forgive myself.

“I want to know as soon as you hear anything. Do you know where Dario is at?”

“He’s on our side of the city, and no one’s said a word to anyone else.”

I know he's telling me that the Russians don't know yet, so I give him a nod and say, "Let's keep it that way for now. I want to see what we're dealing with first."

The Alessi family has a good working relationship with the Bratva, but that doesn't mean I tell them every damn detail. I run my mafia how I want to, and I don't want them involved in this until I know for sure what we're dealing with. Plus, I know that if I were to mention it, all the Melnikov brothers would be over here, insisting they get to question him first, and I can't have that. I want to see this fucker first.

Sandro nods his agreement and then gives Natalya another smile before walking out and shutting the door behind him. With a sigh, I scoop her into my arms and take the seat she was just sitting in. She nestles up against me, her small body fitting perfectly in my lap. Her head rests on my shoulder while her fingers softly play with the back of my hair. I've gone my entire life keeping women at arm's length and being perfectly fine with it, but there's something about Natalya that makes it impossible for me to keep any distance between us. When I see her, I want to touch her. When she's close to me, I can't keep my goddamn hands off her.

"What did he say?"

I kiss her forehead and run my fingers through her long, dark hair. "Nothing that you need to worry about."

She blows out a heavy breath against my neck. "So it's going to be like that?"

I smile at her tone. "Like what?"

"Like you not telling me what's going on and keeping secrets from me. My dad and uncles do the same thing, and I hate it."

"Do you think maybe they do it to keep you safe?"

"I know that's why they do it, but I still hate it. How am I supposed to keep myself safe if I don't know what in the hell is going on?"

"I'll make you a deal, *principessa*. I'll always tell you as much as I safely can. How about that?"

"So what can you tell me now?"

My fingers keep working through her hair while my other hand rests on her thigh with my thumb lightly stroking her soft, bare skin. "Dario and some of my men are following up on a lead, and it's possible we might be able to question someone soon."

At first I think she's going to demand more information, information that I'm not willing to give, but instead she leans closer and presses her lips to my neck, giving me a soft kiss before whispering, "Thank you, Dominic."

Jesus, she has no idea the power she has over me. One look from her, one whispered plea, one touch of her lips against my skin, and I fucking melt.

"I never expected to feel this way about anyone," I admit.

She lifts her head, studying me with her blue eyes. "Feel what exactly?"

I drag a finger along her jaw, taking in the sight of her, memorizing every detail so I'll never forget it.

"Like I'll never be able to let you go."

Her beautiful mouth lifts into a stunning grin, and I can't help but return it.

"You just had to be Lev's daughter, though, didn't you? Jesus Christ."

She laughs at the exaggerated groan I give and cups my face so she can run her fingers through my light beard, something I've noticed she loves to do. "Is it true my dad shot you the first day he met you?"

My shoulder aches at the memory. The bullet had done a lot of damage, and it had taken months of physical therapy to get myself back to where I wanted to be. I'd been so fucking pissed at him.

"It's true. Your dad and Danil thought I was trying to take Simona, but then they found out that I wanted the same thing they did—to find the bastards who were running the sex-trafficking ring. Long story short, we started working together." I give a small shrug. "They've grown on me over the years."

"Why did you want to find them?"

I raise a brow at her. "They didn't tell you?"

"They don't tell me anything. I thought we'd already established that."

I can't help but smile at her tone. She keeps stroking my cheek while she says, "I know my Aunt Alina was taken and that it nearly killed my Uncle Matvey. I know my dad and uncles spent two years searching for her, and I know whatever happened was really terrible. She has a phoenix tattoo on her wrist, and it's covering some deep scars, kind of like how my Uncle Matvey's tattoos cover his burn marks, but I don't know where hers came from. When I ask her, she just smiles and says it's a reminder that our pain doesn't have to define us and that beauty can still come from the ashes."

Her hand stills as her eyes meet mine. “What does all that have to do with you?”

If anyone else were asking, I’d tell them to fuck off, but this is Natalya, the woman I’ve already fallen so fucking hard for, and I can’t deny her anything, including the truth, even if that means breaking my heart to give it to her.

“I had an older sister. Her name was Isabella, and I loved her very much. She was kidnapped while on vacation in Italy, and then her beaten body was found in the North Sea.”

She brings her other hand to my cheek, cupping my face so gently while bringing her forehead to mine. “I’m so sorry, Dominic. I had no idea.”

“You remind me of her a little bit. You share her stubbornness and refusal to listen to me.”

Natalya gives a soft laugh, and she’s so close I can feel the heat of it against my lips.

“What happened? Did you find the man who took her?”

“Danil found him for me.”

She hesitates before whispering, “What did you do?”

Gently fisting the back of her hair, I pull her back so she can see my face. “I killed him very slowly, *principessa*, because that’s the kind of man I am. He killed someone I loved, and I made sure he regretted that before he took his last breath, just like I’m going to make the man who shot at you pay for what he tried to do. Someone hurt you, and they will die a painful death for it. It’s as simple as that.”

I want her to see the truth of what I’m saying. I need her to know the kind of man I am, because if she wants to run screaming from me, now’s the fucking time.

“No one hurts what’s mine, *principessa*.”

Instead of jumping off my lap and running away in horror, she gives me the sexiest smile, reminding me whose daughter she is when she leans in closer and gives my bottom lip a soft suck before whispering against my mouth, “What’s yours, huh?”

“Yes, what’s mine.” I run my tongue along her top lip, the one I’ll never be able to get enough of and say, “I don’t know how in the hell I’m going to keep you, but I’m going to find a way.”

“You better,” she whispers back.

“Your dad’s going to try to shoot me again.”

I say it as a joke, but we both know it's true. Lev is not going to take this news lightly. He's going to want to kill me, and I can't say I blame him. If he knew half the things I want to do to his sweet daughter, he'd make sure the next time he shoots me is a headshot.

"I'll stand in front of you. You're not the only one who protects what's theirs."

Her words shock the hell out of me. She's crazy if she ever thinks there will come a day when I will allow her to put herself in danger for me, but I can tell she's deadly serious. She'd park her tiny five-foot-nothing body right in front of me and risk her life for mine, not because she's forced to, but because she *wants* to. It's the kind of sacrifice that most aren't willing to make, but I know she means it.

"You are never to put yourself in danger for me, *principessa*. Never." I tighten my grip on her hair and kiss her softly. "But it's so goddamn sweet that you want to."

I feel her smile against my lips as one of her hands runs up my forearm. Looking down, she gently traces the octopus that covers a large part of my inner arm, like she instinctively knows there's something personal about this one, something that goes deeper than the rest of the art that covers me.

Her finger traces one long tentacle. "What made you decide to get this?"

"Isabella loved the sea. She always talked about how she wanted to be a marine biologist, but because of who her family is, she never had the freedom to pursue her dreams. Octopuses were her favorite. She was always telling me about how intelligent they are. I got this tattoo after her death. It helps me to remember the happier times I had with her instead of the rage that I still feel every time I think about how she was taken from us."

"It's very beautiful." She lifts her face so our eyes meet again. "I'm so sorry for what happened to her."

"Her death hurt like nothing else ever has, and I was lost to my pain for a very long time, but I'm slowly learning how to be happy again." I pull her closer and kiss her again. "I'm happy when I'm with you, *principessa*."

Her smile lights up her whole face. "I'm happy when I'm with you, too."

I'm just about to kiss her again when my phone buzzes. Knowing what's going on with Dario, there's no way I can ignore it. I give her one quick kiss anyway before I read the message.

Got him. We'll be there in five minutes.

Natalya feels my body tense and her first instinct is to cup the back of my neck and ask, “Are you okay?”

The tension leaves her face when she sees me smile. “Everything’s fine. Stop worrying about me, *principessa*. That’s my job, not yours. I do need to take care of something, though.” I kiss her again, needing to taste her once more, and she softens against me, kissing me back with a hunger that surprises me. She’d come hard, I’d made sure of that, but it’s obvious she’s not even close to being satisfied. It hurts my pride to leave her like this, but there’s no way in hell I can resist questioning the man they’re bringing me. I want to know who’s behind this and why they’re targeting Natalya. I want a fucking name, and when I get my hands on that fucker, I’m going to make sure he knows that he made the biggest mistake of his life when he put a target on my girl’s head.

Giving her tongue one last suck, I pull back and groan at how swollen her lips are, the top one even more plump than usual.

“God, you have the sexiest mouth I’ve ever seen.” I run my thumb over it, wishing she was on her knees again. “I’ll be as quick as I can, but this might take a while. Why don’t you call your dad back, and then maybe you can visit with Lucia in the kitchen? I know she’d love the company. She’ll also make sure you get some lunch.”

“I can’t stay with you?”

“No, sweetheart, not for this.”

She nods, but I can tell she doesn’t like to be excluded. There’s no way she can be involved in this part of my life, though. It’s not safe for her, and I’ll never do anything that puts her life at risk, so with a heavy sigh, I lift her sweet ass off my lap and set her down. She watches me stand, eyeing the erection that’s pressing against my pants with a hungry look in her eyes. I give her a wink and readjust myself.

I cup her face and kiss her forehead. “I’ll come and find you as soon as I’m done.”

“Okay.”

Forcing myself to let her go, I leave my office and head down the hall. I have a room set up in the basement for situations like this, and I know that’s where Dario is going to bring him. Sandro meets up with me by the basement door and gives another small laugh.

“You ready?”

“Of course,” I tell him. “Let’s get some fucking answers.”

He opens the door, letting me go first, and I take the stairs quickly, eager to get my answers. The basement is nice. It's not some damp, concrete room like in a horror movie. It's actually too nice. The plush carpet and cozy, leather furniture didn't lend itself to interrogation. Lucia was sick of getting blood stains out of the carpet, and there wasn't anything to muffle their screams except the door at the top of the stairs. I'd had to get creative and transform one of the rooms into something more appropriate. The carpet was ripped out, and soundproof padding was added to help block out the noise.

That's the room I'm headed towards when the door opens and I hear a man yelling in Russian. Dario steps out, shutting it behind him, muffling the screams as he gives an annoyed sigh.

"He won't shut the fuck up, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't speak a goddamn word of English."

"Fuck," I mutter, scrubbing a hand over my jaw. I don't want to bring the Melnikov brothers into this yet. I'm not ready to hand everything over. I'm not ready to hand *Natalya* over. "I'm sure with enough motivation, he'll remember his English."

I'm all set to carve this fucker up, forcing him to remember the English he learned all the way back in grammar school when Sandro says in Italian, "Your girl is curious, Dominic."

I look over my shoulder, seeing a flash of pink dress before she disappears around the corner. This is not what we agreed on when I left her in my office, nice and safe and far away from the dangerous Russian who may have very recently tried to kill her.

"*Principessa*," I holler out to her, letting her hear the displeasure in my voice. I'm not a man who likes to be disobeyed, and the fact that she's the one who's done it is the only thing that's keeping my temper in check. I round the corner and catch her right as she's about to bolt back up the stairs. Hooking an arm around her waist, I pull her back against me.

"This isn't what we agreed on," I remind her in case she's forgotten the conversation we had less than five minutes ago.

"I'm sorry. I was curious, and then I heard him yell that he was going to kill you all."

"So you heard that and thought getting closer was the smartest option?"

She turns her head so she can glare up at me. I still have her in a tight grip, and the fire in her eyes is quickly making me hard again.

“I thought I could help, and I *can* help, Dominic.”

“No, you can’t, and I don’t want you anywhere near him. It’s not safe.”

“So I suppose you’ve learned Russian since the last time I saw you?”

I raise a brow at her sarcasm.

“Yeah, I didn’t think so. Let me translate for you. I can help.”

“He might be the man who tried to kill you, and he doesn’t know you’re here, and I’m damn well going to keep it that way. He doesn’t get to look at you, *principessa*. I know what I’ll see in his eyes if he does, and then I’m going to end up killing him, and if I do that, then I can’t question him.”

She wiggles around so we’re chest to chest, and instead of being intimidated by the anger that’s radiating off me, she reaches her hands up and cups my face so she can pull me closer. Smiling, she gives me a soft kiss.

“Then blindfold him.”

I laugh at the easygoing way she says it, like it’s a no-brainer and something I probably should’ve already thought of.

“He’ll hear your voice when you translate,” I remind her, “and I don’t want him to know you’re here. I’m pretty confident this man will never see the light of day again, but what if he does? It might be a one-in-a-million chance, but it’s still a chance I’m not willing to take, not with your life, not fucking ever.”

Pulling me even closer, she turns her head and brings her lips to my ear. “Then I’ll whisper so only you can hear me. Please, Dominic. Let me help you.”

When I hesitate, she brushes a soft kiss against the shell of my ear, and I swear I feel her smile when she hears me let out a resigned sigh.

I give her ass a soft smack. “You’re not very good at obeying rules, are you, *principessa*?”

She shrugs and pulls back with a smile. “It depends on if I agree with the rule.”

“Jesus, you’re going to have a very sore ass, sweetheart.” Her eyes widen at my words, but before she can say anything, I holler out to Dario in Italian. “Blindfold him!”

I ignore the soft laugh Sandro gives and wait for Dario to tell me it’s done. When he does, I cup Natalya’s face so she can see how serious I am.

“Not a word. Do you understand? You will stay with me, and if at anytime I feel like it’s not safe for you to be there, I’m going to have one of

my men take you from the room. I don't care if you kick and scream the whole goddamn way."

"I understand," she whispers. "I agree, so you don't have to worry about me disobeying you."

"How fortunate for me. I'm so happy you agree, Natalya."

This time she's the one lifting a brow at my sarcasm. I pick her up because I'm not about to spend the next hour hunched over so she can reach my ear. She wraps her arms and legs around me while I rest an arm under her ass, keeping her dress tucked in so no one else gets a view of her. No one sees this body but me.

When we pass Sandro, I give him a look that screams *Don't you dare say a fucking word*. He smiles and nods at Natalya. She gives him a small wave but remembers to not say anything because the door ahead is open, and apparently because she agrees with me, she's going to listen. How the hell I've started taking orders from an eighteen-year-old, I'll never know, but I carry her ass into the room to where the blindfolded Russian is waiting for us. He's sitting in a black, metal folding chair with his hands tied behind his back. Dark tattoos cover his arms and neck, and the T-shirt that's straining against his chest makes it clear he keeps himself in shape. He might be low-level, but he takes his job seriously. Whether or not he's serious enough to endure torture for his Bratva remains to be seen.

He hears us walk in and turns his head at the noise, no doubt trying to picture what's going on in his mind and trying like hell to figure a way out of the mess he's landed himself in. Looking over at Dario and Sandro, I give them a nod and they immediately walk to stand on either side of the man. I see his body stiffen when he hears their footsteps draw near. He says something in Russian, and Natalya presses her mouth to my ear.

"He said you fucking Italians are going to die for interfering in Bratva business."

I ignore his threat and ask him in English, "Do you speak English?" When he doesn't answer, I switch to Italian and ask if he understands that. He makes no attempt to answer and shows no signs of having understood anything.

When he hisses out another long string of Russian, Natalya says, "He's saying that he doesn't understand a word you're saying and that you can kiss his ass." She presses a soft kiss to my ear. "I'm going to speak very slowly, and I need you to repeat after me."

I cup the back of her head and whisper in her ear, “What are you doing?”

She whispers back, “We’re going to get some information from him,” and the heat of her breath hitting the shell of my ear sends a shiver down my spine. This side of her shouldn’t turn me on as much as it is. I like that she snuck out and came looking for me, not that I’ll ever tell her disobedient ass that, but I like her courage, her fearless attitude when it involves me. It scares me that she’ll put herself in danger one day, but I can’t help but get turned on by it, too.

When I give a soft nod, she very slowly whispers words to me in Russian that I do my best to imitate. They don’t sound near as good coming out of my mouth as they do hers, but the man jerks his head up, surprised but obviously understanding me.

“You just asked him what Bratva he works for,” Natalya explains.

I give her ass a soft pat to let her know I appreciate her help, and I feel her smile against my cheek.

When the man answers, she whispers, “He just told you to fuck off and then insulted your mom.”

I bring my mouth to her ear. “Things are about to get loud and unpleasant. Are you sure you want to stay?”

“Yes,” she quickly whispers back. “I want to help.”

“Don’t turn around, *principessa*,” I tell her before looking at my cousins and telling them in Italian what’s been said. Her fingers play with the back of my hair, and it’s the oddest interrogation I’ve ever been involved in. Holding something precious in my arms while looking at a man I’d very much like to rip apart piece by piece is making my damn head spin.

Dario gives the guy a hard enough punch to loosen some teeth, and Natalya flinches at the sound of it. After several more punches, he spits out a glob of blood and a few teeth. It narrowly misses Sandro’s nice shoes, which only earns him another hard hit to the jaw. The man lets out a pain-filled groan while I repeat the question in Russian. This time when he mutters something, Natalya whispers, “He says they’ll kill him if he says anything.”

I cup the back of her head and run my thumb along the nape of her neck. “Tell me how to ask why they’re specifically targeting you.”

Like before, she whispers the words slowly in Russian while I say them out loud. The man groans and opens his mouth, stretching out the stiffness

before answering the question.

“He said it’s because I’m Lev’s daughter.”

We continue the very slow process of me whispering to her what I want to say and then her telling me the words I need to speak and then translating his answer. Every once in a while I stop and fill my cousins in on what’s going on. I stick to Italian when speaking to them since I’m guessing this guy probably knows a little bit of English, even if it’s not enough for him to actually speak it.

When it’s obvious the man is still not telling me everything, Dario steps in, delivering a few well-placed punches that leave the man gasping for air, and if his hands weren’t tied behind his back, he’d be clutching his broken ribs right now. Natalya burrows her face against my neck and hugs me tighter. Our bodies are pressed together so tightly that I feel the rapid beat of her heart against my chest. It’s a wild rhythm that makes it hard to concentrate on anything other than her.

As soon as he can speak again, he tells me what I want to know. Natalya slowly translates, and the story begins to unfold. Lev rarely does any underground fighting anymore, but a few months ago, he’d stepped in the ring and won. Not unusual considering Lev is undefeated, but he’d unknowingly beat and humiliated Alexei Zolotov, son of Adrian Zolotov—Pakhan of the Zolotov Bratva. They want revenge, and rightly assumed that killing his daughter would hurt Lev far worse than shooting him.

“How do I ask him if they know where you are now?” I whisper in Natalya’s ear. She tells me, and I repeat it. I see the man shake his head before he says, “*Nyet, nyet.*” I don’t need her to translate his no, and I let out a relieved breath at knowing that at least they don’t know where she’s at right now. If he’s lying, Lev and his brothers will get the truth out of him, but for now, I have the information I came in here to get.

“Thank you,” I whisper against her ear.

Her reply is a slow lick of her tongue along my earlobe before giving me a soft suck. When I feel her teeth graze my skin, I squeeze her tighter and whisper, “Behave, *principessa.*”

She doesn’t laugh, but I swear I can feel how badly she wants to. Looking to my cousins, I tell them to watch him while I call the Melnikov Bratva to come pick him up. Sandro’s eyes run over the way I’m still cupping Natalya’s ass, and his smirk is undeniable.

“Not a fucking word,” I tell them both, even though I know I don’t need to. Their loyalty is to me and the Alessi family. They would never tell an outsider about anything that takes place within these walls or within our organization.

I carry Natalya out of the room and back upstairs, not stopping until we’re standing outside the guest room she was supposed to stay in last night. She lets out a soft moan of pleasure when I open the door and she sees the bed.

“About time,” she says, making me laugh.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, but it’s not what you think. You can’t be in my room when your dad comes here. He needs to focus on getting rid of this threat and not on trying to kill me for touching his daughter.”

I set her down on the bed, and she quickly gets on her knees so her face is close to mine. “You can’t keep putting me off, Dominic.”

“You don’t think so?”

Her eyes narrow but then soften when I slowly slide my hands up her dress so I can cup her ass and pull her closer. Cupping her cheeks, I give her a good squeeze and then slide my palm down the crack of her ass until I’m cupping her pussy from behind in a possessive grip that screams ownership. I know she can feel it. I know she understands that I’m claiming her sweet pussy as mine before I’ve even touched her with my cock. It’s mine, even now, even completely untouched, it’s fucking *mine*.

“You’re making it very difficult for me to behave, Dominic.”

I smile when she rocks her hips, trying like hell to grind against my hand. I squeeze her tighter, letting her feel a few seconds of pleasure before pulling back and smacking one round ass cheek.

Meeting her surprised eyes, I give her a wink. “I’m not your daddy, *principessa*, but that doesn’t mean I won’t spank your sweet ass like I am if you disobey me.”

The soft moan she gives almost makes me lose control. She has no idea how badly I want her, no fucking clue how many times she’s been mere seconds away from me bending her over and ripping her panties aside before burying myself inside her. I wonder if she’d be so brazen if she knew the dark thoughts that constantly run through my mind when she’s near. Studying her sweet, hungry face, I let out a soft laugh, because of course she would be. There’s a sweet innocence to Natalya, but there’s also a fire

inside her, a stubborn streak that comes out when she really wants something, and right now that something is my cock.

“Stay here and be a good girl. I need to call your dad and let him know what’s going on. I’d also like to have a chance to get rid of this hard-on that his beautiful daughter caused before I have to see him.”

Her mouth curves up in a sexy grin while she snakes a hand between us, palming my length and giving me a squeeze that has me biting back a groan.

“I could help you out with that.”

“That’s very kind of you, but I’m pretty sure it’ll go away once I leave this room.”

She drags a nail along my head, and even through my pants, I feel every part of her touch. When she starts to massage my dick, I groan and fist the back of her hair tight enough to sting.

“You are a very stubborn woman,” I whisper against her lips. “Do you want me to be hard when I talk to your dad? Is this how you want him to find out about us?”

“No.” She ghosts her lips over mine. “I want you to let me take care of it before you talk to my dad.”

Her offer is tempting, damn tempting, but I know we don’t have time. Lev needs to know what’s going on, and if Natalya gets me off, then I’m going to get her off and one time won’t be enough and soon it’ll be the middle of the night and nothing will have been done about the threat we’re facing. I can’t let that happen. Not now anyway.

Unable to resist her completely, I soften my grip on her hair and cup the back of her head, pulling her against me so I can kiss her. I could lose myself so easily in her lips. She softens against me, opening her mouth and submitting completely, and fuck do I love it. One of her hands cups my face while the other continues to tease my cock with a mix of featherlight touches and a firm kneading of my shaft that has me rocking my hips for more.

“Why is it so goddamn hard to let you go?” I murmur the question against her lips in between kisses. “What the hell have you done to me, *principessa*?”

She smiles and nips at my bottom lip. “The same thing you’ve done to me,” she whispers. “Hurry up and do what you need to do, Dominic, and then come back to me.”

“I’m not a man who’s used to taking orders, sweetheart.” Grazing the backs of my knuckles along her chin, I memorize every detail of her face. “But I find myself wanting to do every damn thing you ask of me.”

“In that case, get naked and give me what I want.”

I laugh, enjoying this lively side that’s starting to come out, and give her ass another smack. “I said I *want* to do everything you ask, not that I will.”

She sighs and gives my cock one last squeeze. “At least you want to, I guess. That’s got to count for something.”

“It counts for a lot,” I tell her, meaning every word. “You have a power over me that no one else has ever had.” I let out a soft laugh and caresses her jaw. “I’m still not sure how I feel about that.”

Her smile spreads across her beautiful face. “You’ll learn to love it.”

Laughing, I give her one more kiss before finally letting her go. “I’m going to call your dad, and then I’m guessing he’ll be here in a few minutes with his brothers. I’ll send him up here before he leaves so he can see for himself that you’re okay.”

I lightly drag the pad of my thumb over her kiss-swollen lips. “I’m going to leave so we can both calm down, because if your dad or uncles see us right now, there’s no way in hell they won’t be able to tell we were just making out like a couple of teenagers.”

She lifts a brow at me and smiles. “I am a teenager.”

“Jesus Christ.” I shake my head at the reminder that she’s only fucking eighteen years old. It’s so easy to forget when we’re together. She doesn’t act her age. There’s a maturity about her that makes it very easy to forget how young she is. I feel drawn to her, and I know at this point I couldn’t stay away from her even if I wanted to. The truth is I’ve fallen hard for Lev Melnikov’s daughter, and I won’t be letting her go.

I kiss her forehead and then force myself to back away. “Stay in here, *principessa*. I’ll be back soon.”

Her sweet smile is the last thing I see before I shut the door and walk away, putting some much-needed distance between us. I wasn’t kidding about not wanting to greet her dad with a hard-on. It’s going to be difficult enough to face him now that I know what his daughter’s pussy tastes like.

Sending him a text while I walk, I tell him I have someone and to get over here as quickly as possible. His response is immediate.

We’ll be there in twenty.

With the Melnikov Bratva on their way, I alert my guards at the gate, letting them know to expect them soon before I head back downstairs to check on my cousins, pushing Natalya from my mind as best I can. I need to keep her safe, and I can't do that if my head is in the goddamn clouds. I've always been calm, cold, and in control, but the second she called me for help, all that went to shit. In the last twenty-four hours my men have seen me lose my composure and run out of the house to meet Natalya, scared to death that she was hurt, hold her and comfort her like she means something to me, and carry her to my bedroom.

They may not know exactly what's going on, but they know something has changed. They know she means something to me, and it's a reminder that one day others will know. Dangerous men who want me dead will know that hurting her is the way to hurt me, and just the thought of her being on their radar sends an icy chill down my spine.

I can't let anything happen to her. I won't fucking allow it. Keeping Natalya safe has just become my number one priority. My sweet *principessa* thinks her dad is strict, but it's nothing compared to the rules I'm going to have in place.

Chapter 10

Natalya

I pace the floor of the guest room while I call Svetlana. It barely rings before she's answering and asking me a million questions at once.

Laughing, I try to talk over her and say, "Breathe, Sveta. Too many questions, and I can't hear a single one of them because you're talking too fast."

She pauses, taking the first breath since she answered. "What the hell is going on?"

I flop back on the bed and sigh. "So much I don't even know where to begin."

"Start with the other night. They said you were shot at and that Grigori's in the hospital. What the hell happened?"

I fill her in on the details, and when I get to the part where Dominic carried me into his house, she lets out a soft hum of approval and says, "Now we're getting to the good stuff."

"Relax. He just wanted to make sure I was safe."

"Uh-huh."

I ignore her sarcasm and give her an update on Grigori and a very PG-rated version of events. Part of me wants to tell her every detail, but a bigger part of me wants to keep it just between Dominic and me. It feels private and just for us, and I really want what we shared to stay that way. I do tell her we kissed, though, because I'm only human and she is my best friend.

"Oh my god, is he a good kisser?" She sighs, and I can easily picture the smile on her face. "I bet he is. I mean how could he not be? He looks like

pure sin, Natalya, and now that you've had a taste, you'll never be able to get enough."

I laugh, but she's not wrong. I never will be able to. He's always going to leave me craving more.

"My dad is going to kill us," I say, voicing my worst fear. "He'll never forgive me for this."

Svetlana's voice softens, and just the sound of it makes me feel better. "Your dad could never hate you, and you know that. Is he going to be thrilled that you've gone and fallen for a man who's only a couple years younger than him, a man he's now trusting to keep his precious daughter safe? No, probably not. When he told Dominic to keep his little princess safe, I'm pretty sure he didn't mean while you're naked and in his bed."

"That is so helpful," I tell her, but it makes me laugh, which was her goal all along. "And I haven't been naked in his bed, just to set the record straight."

"I'm guessing that's not from lack of trying." She bursts out laughing after she says it, and I can't help but join in because she has no idea how accurate she is.

"You're terrible."

She lets out another laugh. "I can't help it. You're living the dream. I'm a little jealous, but I'm crazy happy for you."

"I'm not living anything. I'm only here because my dad thinks it's what's safest, but that's not going to last long, and then I'll have to leave." The thought makes my chest ache, and before I can start worrying and get all emotional, I say, "I need to get going. My dad's going to be here any minute, and I know he's going to want to see me to make sure I'm okay."

"Try not to look as horny for Dominic as you did the night we went to his club."

"I did not!"

She snorts out a laugh. "Whatever you say, *principessa*."

I laugh at her terrible Italian accent and tell her bye, promising to let her know if anything else happens. As soon as we hang up, I send a quick text to Mia and Sasha through our sibling group chat, thanking Mia for the bag and letting them both know I'm fine. I know they're getting updates from our parents, but I miss them and want to reach out. I smile when Mia's message comes in.

I can't believe you were in a gunfight. All the cool stuff happens to you.

Sasha's response is right behind hers. *Glad you're okay, sis. Mia, I can tell keeping you safe is going to be my full-time job until the day I die.*

She responds with the angel emoji and then throws in a few black hearts for good measure. God, I love the two of them. Still smiling, I put my phone away and start pacing again. I know I told Dominic I'd stay in here, but it's not like me walking around downstairs is going to alert my dad to anything. It'd actually be weirder to stay up here in a guest room that looks like it hasn't been used and is devoid of all my stuff. Dominic obviously didn't think this one through.

Before I can talk myself out of it, I open the door and head back downstairs. I haven't even gotten halfway down the staircase when I hear my dad's angry voice.

"Why the hell didn't you call me as soon as you got him?"

"He was found in my territory by my men," Dominic calmly reminds him. "I wanted to see if he knew anything before I called you."

"And how did you expect that to happen? Did you learn Russian while you were gone?"

I recognize my Uncle Roman's voice, sounding just as pissed as my dad.

"You said you learned something," my dad says, jumping in again. "How did you translate?"

Dominic hesitates just long enough to have my dad growling, "You better not fucking say what I think you're about to say."

The rage in his voice has me picking up the pace as I round the corner and barge into the office I'd just recently been warming Dominic's cock in. I try not to think about everything we did in this very room while I look up at my dad and uncles before finally meeting Dominic's eyes. The look he's giving me makes it clear he's going to have some things to say once we're alone again.

"Princess," my dad says, walking over to me and pulling me in for a tight hug. He kisses the top of my head, and a wave of guilt washes through me. The last person on earth I want to hurt is my dad, but when I look past him and meet Dominic's brown eyes, I feel torn like I've never been before. He watches me while I hug my dad, his face completely unreadable, and when my dad pulls back to see me better, I turn my head to meet the worried look he's giving me.

"Are you okay?"

“Dad, I’m fine.” When he still doesn’t look convinced, I smile up at him and add, “I promise. Have you heard anything else about Grigori? Is he still recovering okay?”

My dad keeps running his eyes over me, making sure I’m not hurt. “He’s fine, honey. He won’t ever be able to do his old job, but he kept you safe, and he’ll be rewarded for that.”

“Yeah, he’ll be living the good life from here on out,” my Uncle Vitaly jokes. “His wife will spoil him rotten, and he’ll get to relax and work on his beer gut.”

“I’m sure he’ll love that,” I say, feeling guilty for Grigori and the forced retirement he’s about to be handed.

Uncle Vitaly steps closer. “Are you kidding? He’s always talking about how he would love to live in a cabin on the lake and spend his days fishing and drinking beer. He’s going to be thrilled. Danil just hooked him up with a beautiful cabin, and Grigori’s wife is already having their things moved so he can go there once he’s released from the hospital. She thinks it’ll help with his recovery to get him out of the loud city.”

My dad, refusing to be distracted, runs a hand over his jaw, and I watch his lip ring move with the motion. “How does Dominic know what was said?”

I give my dad a big smile. “Because I translated for him.” His jaw hardens and I can feel the anger start to radiate off him, so I quickly add, “I wanted to help, and we made sure that the man never saw or heard me. He has no idea I’m here, Dad.”

“And how the hell did you manage that?” he asks.

My eyes dart to Dominic. He’s standing near his desk, arms crossed over his chest and wearing a very obvious *Let’s see how you get your sweet ass out of this one* look on his gorgeous face. I force my attention back to my dad.

“He was blindfolded, and I whispered what he was saying. Then I told him how to ask certain questions in Russian. It’s not a big deal, Dad. It didn’t last long, and the guy had no idea I was there.”

My dad turns to Dominic. “I can’t believe you let her do this.”

Dominic sighs and perches on the edge of his desk, resting his hand on the exact spot where he’d eaten me out. His fingers drum on the hard wood, and I feel my face start to flush.

“I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t think she was safe, Lev.”

I can't take my eyes off the way he's still softly tapping his fingers, and when I finally look up, his dark eyes bore into mine, letting me know that he knows exactly what he's doing and how it's affecting me. Uncle Matvey starts talking to my dad in Russian, telling him that maybe it wasn't such a bad idea, but I can barely focus on that. All I can do is watch Dominic, and when he smacks the top of the desk with his open palm, I give a small jump and my heart races. Yeah, he's pissed I disobeyed him and came down here. He gives me a very pointed look and smacks the desk again, letting me know it'll soon be my ass.

My dad and uncles look over at the noise, but Dominic's perfect mask is back in place and he's no longer looking like he wants to bend me over and spank my ass red.

"Do you want to know what we found out?" he asks them.

"I want to punch you so fucking hard right now," my dad says, "but, yes, obviously we want to know what the hell you found out."

Dominic ignores the punch comment and says, "He works for the Zolotov Bratva. Apparently you recently beat the shit out of Alexei Zolotov. His dad runs the Bratva. He wasn't pleased about you humiliating his son, so he thought going after Natalya would even things out."

My dad thinks for a minute. "The only fight I've done recently was with some stupid fuck who talked a lot of shit but couldn't back it up."

"I'm guessing that stupid fuck was Alexei?" Vitaly asks.

"I had no idea," my dad says. "He kept his shirt on, so I didn't see any tattoos. He'd spoken Russian, but it's not unusual to find Russian speakers in a city this big. I never would've guessed he was in a Bratva. He was such a—"

He stops, searching for the right word until my Uncle Vitaly laughs and says, "Pussy?"

My dad shrugs. "I mean, yeah. I fought him, won, and didn't think anything else of it." He looks back at Dominic. "So because I beat this little shit up, his daddy is getting revenge by attacking my family?"

"It looks that way, yes," Dominic answers.

My dad looks back down at me, and I can see the determination and the *my mind is made up* look in his eyes. "You're coming back with me. I'm going to assign extra bodyguards to watch the building, and you're not leaving the apartment until this is taken care of."

"I think I'm safer here," I quickly say, looking to Dominic for help.

“She’s right, Lev.”

I try to hide how much it means to me that Dominic immediately stepped in to help. I don’t want to leave. I’m not ready to walk away from whatever the hell is going on between us, and I can tell he doesn’t want me to either. If he didn’t want me here, I wouldn’t be here. A man like Dominic doesn’t do anything he doesn’t want to do. He’s always in control, and I’m drawn to his dominance in ways I can’t explain.

“How the hell is she safer here?”

Dominic watches my dad and then looks to my uncles. “They don’t know she’s here. They have no idea where Natalya is right now, and we need to keep it that way. They’re looking for her, but this is the last place they’ll ever think to look.”

“He’s right,” my Uncle Danil says. “She’s safer here, Lev, for now at least.”

“We need to question him.” My Uncle Roman motions towards the hall. “Where is he? Downstairs?”

Dominic pushes off from his desk and starts walking out the door. “I’ll bring you to him.”

My dad and uncles follow, and since no one stops me, I tag along. Once we’re back downstairs, I see Dominic’s cousins sitting on the couch. The door where we’d questioned the man is closed, and I’m guessing he’s still in there tied to the chair.

Dominic points to the couch. “These are my cousins, Dario and Alessandro.” He then points to my dad and uncles. “These men run the Melnikov Bratva.” Starting from the left, he goes down the line. “Roman, Danil, Matvey, Vitaly, and Lev.” His brown eyes meet mine, and I hear the soft sigh he gives, clearly not pleased that I haven’t run my ass back to the guest room. “Natalya, you already know, of course.”

Sandro gives me a quick smile, no doubt remembering how I’d been wrapped around his boss not too long ago, whispering into his ear, but Dario keeps his attention on my dad and uncles. Eventually, he gives them a slow nod to acknowledge their presence.

My dad turns to rest his hands on my shoulders. Speaking in Russian, he asks, “Are you sure you’re okay staying here? If you want to leave, we can make it work. Maybe you could go to the farmhouse, or you could stay with Sveta?”

“Dad, it’s okay. I’ll be fine here. I don’t want to make things harder or put anyone else at risk. You don’t need to be worrying about this when you need to be focusing on stopping this guy. Will Mia and Sasha be okay? What about Sveta and Yelena?”

“All the kids will be on lockdown,” my dad says.

“Hell yes they will be,” my Uncle Matvey adds. “A threat on one of us is a threat to the entire family.”

Uncle Roman joins in. “If they can’t find you, it’s very possible they’ll go after someone else.”

They see my worried look, and Uncle Danil says, “Don’t worry. No one is allowed to go anywhere right now or be left alone. We already have extra men watching over everyone, and I’m going to find out everything I can about the Zolotov Bratva. We’ll also be questioning the guy Dominic’s men found.”

“We’re going to end this, princess,” my dad tells me, squeezing my shoulders and kissing the top of my head. “I love you. Now go upstairs because your part in this is done. I don’t want this asshole anywhere near you.”

“I love you too, Dad. Be careful.”

He gives me a big smile that pulls his lip ring to the side. “Always, princess.”

Uncle Vitaly sends off a quick text. “I’m going to pick up Val, Luka, and Max. I’ll meet you guys at the warehouse.” He gives me a grin, reminding me so much of Sveta. “It’s time to teach some interrogation techniques. These pearls of wisdom need to be passed down.”

I can’t help but laugh at his excitement. My family is so fucked up, but I love them all so goddamn much. I give them each a hug and tell them to be safe before turning to go back upstairs. I chance one quick look back to see Dominic staring at me. One corner of his mouth lifts up just enough for me to see the secret smile, and then it’s gone and he’s leading the others to the closed door. I know he won’t open it until I’m gone, so I go back upstairs. Knowing my dad won’t be coming up to look for me, I bypass the guest room and go back into Dominic’s.

Being in his personal space calms me, and when I lay down on the bed and hug one of his pillows to me, I can smell him on the sheets, the spicy cologne that I can’t ever seem to get enough of surrounds me as I snuggle in deeper. The huge picture of Bernini’s sculpture hangs on the wall directly in

front of me, and I study it while I wait for Dominic. I'm just as intrigued by it as I was the first time I saw it and make a mental note to send Sveta a picture of it. I know she'll love it purely from an artist's standpoint. I wish I had even a smidgen of her artistic talent, but I can't seem to get beyond stick figures. She gets so annoyed when I ask her to draw in front of me because I'm constantly interrupting to ask her how in the hell she does it. She keeps telling me I could learn if I practice enough, but I'm not so sure about that. My eyes run over Hades's hand and how it's gripping Persephone's thigh. I'm not so sure the talent involved in something like that could ever be fully learned. I'm guessing I could eventually move beyond basic stick figures, but I'm pretty sure a lifetime of practice would never have me creating the next *Mona Lisa*.

I'm still lost in the lines of the sculpture when I hear the door open behind me. Sitting up, I turn and watch Dominic enter the room, shutting the door behind him. He must be exhausted, but he walks toward me like a lion stalking his prey. His dark eyes run over me, lingering on the way my dress has hiked up my thigh.

I can tell he's still angry that I didn't stay in the guest room like he'd told me to, but when I start to apologize, he holds up his hand. My words die in my throat, not because I'm so quick to follow orders but because I'm surprised by the barely contained rage behind the movement.

"I don't want to hear your apology, *principessa*."

His accent is thicker, voice deeper, and when he puts his hands on his hips and shakes his head, I'm distracted by the olive skin of his forearms and the obvious veins that disappear under his rolled-up shirt. That vivid octopus tattoo is going to be the end of me. His angry string of Italian jolts me out of my haze, and I bring my eyes to meet his. He's still pissed. That much is obvious. He keeps his dark eyes on mine and hisses out another sentence. I don't understand a damn bit of it, but each word has my panties growing a little wetter.

I lick my lips and say, "Please tell me that means get naked and spread your legs for me in Italian."

He barks out a harsh laugh, disbelief written all over his face. "I'm torn between wanting to spank your ass red and wanting to fuck you so hard you won't be able to walk for days."

A blush creeps up my chest at his words. I've seen this man's cock. I know this isn't an idle threat, and even though part of my brain is screaming

at me to clamp my thighs shut and protect my innocent pussy, the other part must be stronger because it already has me opening my legs in invitation while I almost purr out a *yes please*.

Dominic notices and sighs. "Don't fucking tempt me, *principessa*. I'm barely hanging on as is."

"Then let go and take what you want."

"Natalya," he warns, closing the distance between us until he's standing right in front of me. He towers over me, reminding me of our size difference, but instead of scooting away from him like he's probably secretly hoping I will, I get up on my knees and rest my hands on his chest.

"Your dad was just here," he reminds me.

"But he's not now."

He reaches a hand up, sliding his fingers into my hair and cupping the back of my head, holding me in place as he steps closer. Our chests are almost touching, and I can feel the rapid beat of his heart against the palm of my hand. Bringing his other hand to my face, he grazes the back of his knuckles along my cheek.

"How long before he notices the way you look at me?"

My breath catches in my throat, and I can't look away. I'm caught in his stare, the intensity in his dark eyes and the hunger that's right below the surface, boiling and ready to spill over. I'm tired of him holding back, so I take a breath and move my fingers to the top button of his shirt.

"Natalya," he growls in warning when I pop open the first button.

I start on the second. "I can hide how I'm feeling."

He raises a brow at me. "Since when?" The pad of one finger runs along my cheek. "I know when a woman wants to fuck me, sweetheart, and you've been giving me fuck-me eyes since I saw you at the farmhouse. Someone's going to notice."

My fingers still at the casual *fuck-me eyes* comment. I'd been hoping this might be something more to him, but if he's just going to lump me into the large pool of women who just want a quick fuck from him, then I have no desire to take this any further.

His head tilts as he watches me, immediately noticing the change in my demeanor. Keeping my gaze focused on the button my fingers were just working on, I say, "I think I might have misread things."

When I start to pull back, he grabs my wrists, holding me in place. "Misread what?" His voice is soft, but there's an edge to it.

“What you want.”

“And what do I want, *principessa*?”

Pulling one of my hands up, he drags his nose along the inside of my wrist, inhaling the scent of my skin. My heart races at the intimate touch and the gentle way he’s holding me in place.

“A quick fuck,” I whisper. “A one-time thing.”

He gives a sexy laugh, the heat of it hitting my sensitive skin before he places a kiss on my inner wrist. His eyes meet mine, and the heat in them has me parting my lips.

“Quick is not something I want with you.” He kisses my inner wrist again. “Hours, days, years.” He pauses, gauging my reaction before whispering “A lifetime” against my skin. “And as far as the one-time thing you’re so worried about, that was never going to happen. I knew the second I laid eyes on you that one time would never be enough.”

“Dominic,” I whisper, watching him slowly kiss a line down my arm.

“I know you’re scared and this is all new for you, but please don’t ever insult me like that again. I would never treat you like that. I would never fuck you and toss you aside. I want you, Natalya, all of you, and once I have you, I’m not letting you go.”

The wet heat of his tongue runs along the inside of my elbow, causing a shiver to run down my spine and a growing ache to bloom between my legs. His lips press against the spot he just licked, sucking me gently and making me rethink my position on elbows not being sexy places on the body. I had no idea the crook of my arm was so goddamn sensitive.

“Damn,” I whisper, making him give a soft laugh before lifting his eyes to mine.

“I could teach you so many things, *principessa*, but the choice is yours. If you don’t want this to go any further, then you need to tell me now. I’ll walk out that door and never lay another hand on you again.”

My heart races at the thought of him leaving, and my hand grips his forearm like I have the physical strength to hold him in place. His lips quirk up in the sexiest grin at my instinct to latch onto him.

“What’s option two?” I whisper, already knowing I want nothing to do with option one.

“Option two?” He hovers his mouth over my skin and meets my eyes again. “That’s where I spend the night fucking this sweet body and making it mine, *principessa*, and once it’s mine, it will never be anyone else’s.”

My eyes grow heavy-lidded at his words and I try to pull my arms free so I can wrap them around him, but he tightens his grip on me. Holding me in place, he gives me another slow, teasing lick along my inner arm.

“Dominic,” I whisper, needing to touch him. “Please.”

Ignoring me, he straightens back up and looks down at me. “Choose wisely, sweetheart. Once I slide into you, it’s the only cock you’re ever going to have. I will *never* share you, and I will never let you go.”

My head is spinning with everything he’s said, and my anxiety starts to rise. I know how I feel about him, and I know it’s not going to change, but what about him? So I ask the question that terrifies me.

“What if you decide you don’t want me anymore? What if you don’t like it? What if I’m not good at it and you decide you want someone else?”

The thought of him with another woman causes an ache in my chest, but I’d rather know now instead of later. His face softens when he looks down at me. He lets go of my arms so he can cup my face and press his body to mine.

“I haven’t even looked at another woman since I saw you step out of that car, Natalya. You’re all I can fucking think about. I would never be unfaithful to you.” He gives me a sexy smile and drags his finger along my jaw. “And there’s no way in hell you could ever be bad in bed. You’re way too goddamn sexy when you come on my face. Your soft whimpers, the way you rock your hips and pull my hair, fuck, *principessa*, you were made for me.”

He drags the pad of his thumb along the seam of my lips and lets out a sexy groan. “If you’re going to choose option one, you need to do it now.”

“Why’s that?” I smile against his thumb, unable to resist teasing him a bit.

“So I can bury my head between your legs again and convince you that you made the wrong choice.”

I smile and kiss the pad of his thumb. “You’re very confident in your skills.”

He gives another deep, sexy laugh and my whole body melts at the sound. I love seeing him like this. The armor is down, the weight of the world no longer sits on his shoulders, and with the big, unguarded smile on his face, he looks so much younger than his forty-three years.

Leaning closer so our lips are almost touching, he whispers, “I’m very confident in your body’s reaction to me.”

To prove his point, he closes the distance and gives my top lip a soft suck while dragging his fingers down my spine. I let out a soft gasp and melt against him, opening my lips for more.

“Do you see how perfect you are?” he murmurs, teasing me with another soft lick. His hand trails lower, tracing my spine until he reaches my ass. Filling his palm with one cheek, he gives me a squeeze and presses me even tighter against him. The hard length of him digs into my stomach, and all I want to do is get him naked and inside me.

“Do you want this?” He rocks his hips and nips at my lip again. When I nod my head, he squeezes my ass harder. “I need to hear you say it, *principessa*.”

“Yes, I want this,” I whisper, already reaching up to start on his buttons again.

“You want what?” His mouth lifts in a sexy smile as he rocks his hips again.

“You know what I want.”

He smiles even bigger at my tone and the way my cheeks are turning red. Pulling back just enough for him to see me better, he drags a finger along one of my flaming cheeks.

“I know exactly what you want, Natalya, but I want to hear you say it.” His finger runs over my mouth, lightly grazing my lips. “I want to hear those filthy words come from your sweet mouth.”

Cupping my face and ass, he lightly grazes my cheek with his nose, breathing me in before he whispers, “Say it, sweetheart. Say, Dominic, I want your cock inside me. Tell me that you don’t care that I’m more than twice your age or that I’m friends with your dad. Let me hear you say it, *principessa*.”

The hand on my ass slips lower before he snakes it under my dress and inside my panties, filling his palm with my bare cheek. He massages me, digging his fingers in and kneading my round ass until I’m practically purring at how damn good it feels. When he dips lower and cups my bare pussy, he growls something in Italian and holds me tighter.

“You’re so fucking wet.” His accent is thicker, and the sound of it has me wetting his fingers even more. When he feels it, he groans and rests one finger along my soaking wet slit, pressing in just hard enough to part my lips without sinking fully inside. When I clench around his finger, he groans and growls, “Jesus fucking Christ, *principessa*. You trying to pull me in?”

“Maybe.”

“Tell me.” He presses in just a bit harder. “Fucking beg me for it.”

I’m all set to hold out because I like the push-and-pull we have going, but then he brushes the pad of his finger along my clit, and I’m done for.

“Please,” I beg.

When he just raises a brow at me, I add, “I want your cock inside me, Dominic.”

I’m rewarded with another soft stroke along my clit.

“I don’t care that you’re more than twice my age.”

My knees nearly buckle when he drags his finger along my sensitive folds, making every part of my body throb with need.

“And?”

I meet his gorgeous eyes. “And I don’t care that you’re friends with my dad.”

“Good girl,” he groans and very slowly slides his finger into me. “This is mine, *principessa*. Say it.”

“This is yours,” I whisper, clutching his shirt as he fingers me faster.

“What’s mine?”

I let out a frustrated groan that has him fighting a grin. “My pussy,” I tell him. “My pussy is yours, Dominic.”

“Only mine?”

“Yes.” Sliding my hand down, I grip the hard length of him. “And what about you?”

I don’t miss the soft laugh he gives. “What about me?”

“Is this mine and only mine?”

I massage his cock, feeling it grow even bigger as he strains against his pants, desperate to break free and claim me. He closes his eyes, rocking his hips and leaning into my touch. The sight of him so obviously enjoying my touch is the sexiest goddamn thing I’ve ever seen.

“Is it?” I ask again, and this time when he opens his eyes to meet mine, the raw hunger in them steals the breath from my lungs. Keeping his finger buried inside me, he brings his other hand to wrap around mine, squeezing me so I’m gripping his cock tighter.

“This is yours, *principessa*, and *only* yours. No other woman will ever have it. I’m not a good man, sweetheart, but I am a man of my word, and I’m giving it to you now. I am yours, and you are mine. I’m done fighting it.”

As soon as the words leave his gorgeous lips, he's pressing his mouth to mine and kissing me like he'll never be able to get enough. He fingers me from behind as he sucks my tongue further into his mouth. The soft strokes against my inner walls pull feral groans from my body as I clutch his shirt with one hand and his cock with the other, using both to pull him harder against me.

"I'm going to need you to get naked now." I pant the words out in between kissing him, feeling his lips pull up in a smile.

He slides his finger out of me with a deliberate slowness that has me arching my back and letting out a needy whimper that would embarrass me in any other situation.

"You're so beautiful when you're like this, *principessa*, so desperate for what only I can give you." He keeps his eyes on mine as he brings his wet finger to his lips, slowly sucking it clean. "I will never get tired of tasting you. So fucking delicious." He cups my face and runs his tongue along the seam of my lips, giving me a hint of my own juices. "I think I might be addicted to you."

He's not joking when he says it. Instead, he looks completely serious and slightly stunned.

"You don't have to look so dumbfounded by it," I say, coming to my own defense.

"But I am."

"Nice, Dominic. That's exactly what I want to hear right now."

He smiles and runs a hand up the side of my dress. "You're so fond of pink, but I think red might suit you better. When you get upset, you release your claws, *principessa*, and go for blood."

When I start to argue, he brings a hand to my neck, tightening his fingers just enough to cut off my words and startle me into silence. He smirks at the angry, wide-eyed look I'm giving him.

"Like I said, claws, sweetheart, but don't try to bleed me just yet. I never wanted relationships or love or kids. The very idea of it has always terrified me and made me feel like I couldn't breathe, but then I came back to America and watched you step out of Svetlana's car in that pink dress and those fucking heels." He groans and shakes his head. "Those fucking goddamn heels. I haven't been able to get you out of my mind. I can't stop thinking about you and wanting you and wishing I had you. It's driving me fucking crazy."

I grip his wrist and he loosens his grip on my neck just enough so I can speak. "And what about now? What do you want now?"

The dark look in his eyes as he takes in the sight of me should be a warning. It should remind me of how dangerous he is, but instead it just makes me want him all the more.

"What do I want now?" His voice is low and strained, and I can tell he's trying to keep himself in check.

"Yes," I whisper. "What do you want?"

"I want to fuck you. I want to slide into you so deeply that you'll never be free of me. I want to mark you as mine. I want to hear you scream my name and beg me for more, and I want to fill your pussy with so much cum you'll be dripping it for days. I want every fucking part of you, *principessa*, and I don't know what in the hell to do about that."

"Then do it," I say, surprising the hell out of him. "Do everything you just said."

"You want me to fuck you raw?"

"Yes," I tell him, meaning it. If it were anyone else, I'd be yelling fuck no and getting my ass the hell out of here, but this isn't just anyone, and the idea of Dominic fucking me skin-to-skin and coming inside me has my whole body humming with pleasure and about to burst.

"You don't know what you're asking."

I smile and start working on his buttons again. "I know exactly what I'm asking, so are you going to give me what I want or not?"

He gives me another sexy grin, the ones I'm quickly becoming addicted to, and tightens his grip on my neck, pulling me closer so our lips are almost touching.

"I'm not convinced you can handle it, *principessa*. I've been using all my willpower since you came into my home, and I'm about at the end of it." He kisses me hard, letting me feel his strength, the power behind his touch and the way his body is softly shaking as he tries to restrain himself.

"I'm terrified I'm going to break you in two, little one." He groans and bites my top lip before sucking the pain away. "I don't want to hurt you," he admits, and the pain in his voice has me reaching up to cup his face.

"I trust you, Dominic. I know you won't give me more than I can take." He still doesn't seem convinced, so I kiss him again and say, "I trust you with my body, and I trust you with my heart. I know you won't break either one."

Letting go of my neck, he slides the palm of his hand down so it's resting on my heart. His brown eyes meet mine as he whispers, "Never, *principessa*."

Kissing me gently, he murmurs against my lips, "I'm trusting you too, Natalya. I'm trusting you to not break my heart, because I wouldn't fucking survive it, sweetheart."

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Chapter 11

Dominic

She looks surprised by my confession, but every word of it is the truth. I lost my sister, and it nearly killed me. To lose Natalya would be the end of me. I don't open my heart easily, I never have, but I can't keep it closed off when I'm with her. She gets under my skin, burrowing to the most vulnerable parts of who I am, and makes herself right at home, like she was always supposed to be there.

Being in love isn't something I ever wanted, but I'm helpless to resist the woman in front of me, and I'm sick of trying to fight it. Life is too goddamn short, and I know without a shadow of a doubt that I want to spend whatever is left of mine with her.

"Undress me," I tell her before pressing my lips back to hers. Her shaky fingers work my buttons while I delve inside her sweet mouth, needing as much of her as I can get. Impatient, she races through the last two buttons and then jerks my shirt out of my pants and yanks it down my arms. I smile against her mouth, loving how eager she is, and drop my arms so the shirt can fall to the floor.

"Keep going," I whisper, looking down so I can watch her. Everything about her is small in comparison to me, and I hope like hell I can keep myself in check, but the truth is all I want to do is spread her thighs and slam into her as hard as I can. Tonight is going to test me like nothing else ever has.

She gets my belt undone and then pops the button before slowly unzipping my pants. My cock has been straining against my pants since I walked into the bedroom, and I swear I've never been this fucking hard in my life.

“Take me out, *principessa*. Wrap that small hand around my dick and pull me free.”

She licks her lips, having no idea what the sight of it does to me and runs her fingers over my abs like she’s trying to memorize every detail of this moment. She’s not the only one. I’m going to be replaying this night in my mind for the rest of my life. Her fingers dance along my abs and around my waist, tracing the tattoos that mark my skin and sending little shockwaves of pleasure through every part of me.

“You’re driving me crazy, baby. Take my cock out before I lose my goddamn mind.” The words are meant to be a growl, but I know them for what they are—a desperate plea for her to have mercy on me because I don’t know how much more of this sweet torture I can take. I wasn’t lying about my fears. I’m scared to death I’m going to lose all restraint and fuck her little pussy bloody. I don’t want to tear her if I can help it. I want to do this right, I want to go slow, and I want her to love it because I plan on fucking her a lot.

Slipping her hand into my pants, I feel her fingertips graze my shaft as I hiss out a breath. Her touch is soft and hesitant and not at all what I need.

“Harder, *principessa*, you won’t hurt me.”

She wraps her slender fingers around me as best she can and pulls me out. I breathe a sigh of relief when my cock is free of the constraints of my pants. Running her hand up my shaft, she pulls another groan from me with her delicate touches and eager curiosity.

“Get me naked.”

This time, I don’t have to ask her twice. She pulls on my pants, stepping off the bed so she can tug them all the way down. Grabbing one foot at a time, she rids me of my shoes and socks before yanking my pants off the rest of the way. She’s breathless in her excitement, and when she stands back up, she’s wearing a proud grin and drinking in the sight of my naked body that’s now on full display.

“You’re so beautiful,” she whispers, making me smile at the awe in her voice.

I step closer and grab her hands, bringing them back to my body. “I’m glad you approve because I’m the only naked man you’re ever going to see, *principessa*.”

“Well that hardly seems fair. You’ve seen lots of naked women, and I’m supposed to be content seeing only one naked man for the rest of my life?”

I raise a brow at her teasing tone and close the distance between us, letting my cock dig into her stomach. She's more than a foot shorter than me, so she's forced to tilt her head back to meet my eyes. I cup the back of her head, fisting her hair and tilting her back even more because I like the way it exposes her neck to me. I like how fragile she looks. I tighten my grip on her, pulling just hard enough to sting.

"I'm going to enjoy fucking that attitude out of you, *principessa*." I slide my free hand down her side, slipping it under her dress so I can palm one of the round ass cheeks I'll never be able to get enough of. "You're going to have more cock than you're going to know what to do with, sweetheart. There won't be any room left in your head for anyone but me. I'm going to make sure you're always sore and always walking around with a satisfied smile on your face. If you ever look at another man with longing, then I'm not doing my job right. And, sweetheart..."

I wait until her eyes meet mine and then lean in closer. "I *always* do my fucking job right."

Releasing her hair, I grip her dress and pull it over her head in one quick motion. The fabric slips through my fingers and falls to the floor at our feet, leaving her in nothing but a lacy, pink bra and matching panties. I drag the backs of my fingers over her breast, watching her nipple harden beneath my touch, straining against the delicate lace.

"You're stunning," I tell her, filling my palm with her small breast. She lets out a soft moan, leaning into my touch. "I'm going to worship every inch of your body, *principessa*. You don't need to worry about other women, because you've already erased them from my mind. There's no one but you. There will never be anyone but you, Natalya."

Her lips part in a gasp when I give her nipple a tender squeeze before reaching around to unhook her bra, letting it fall to the floor. My eyes take in every inch of her perfect tits as my hands skim lower to hook under her panties, roughly tugging them down to puddle at her feet. I step back so I can see her better, feeling pre-cum leave my body to drip down my shaft. It's my first time seeing her fully naked since the glimpse I got of her in the tub. I've seen pieces of her since then, but never the whole thing all at once, and the sight takes my breath away. All I can do is stare at her like it's my first time seeing a naked woman.

A blush rises up her chest, and she shifts her weight from foot to foot, watching me like she doesn't quite believe what I'm saying. I don't like

seeing her doubt how I feel. I don't ever want her to question what's between us or my loyalty to her.

Closing the distance again, I pick her up, smiling when she quickly wraps her arms and legs around me like there's nowhere else she'd rather be. Her light blue eyes meet mine, reminding me whose daughter she is and what's at stake if we take this further.

"Are you sure about this? There's no going back once I'm inside you," I warn her, but the truth is there's already no going back, not for me anyway. If she wants to stop, I'll stop, but I'm not letting her go. I'll wait for however long it takes to convince her she's mine, and I'll kill any fucker who tries to come between us. Natalya Melnikov is officially off the fucking market.

She calms my racing mind when she smiles and says, "I'm sure."

I feel her smooth pussy against my cock, and when I grip her hips and slide her up and down the length of me, coating my shaft in her juices and the cum I'd pushed into her earlier, she whispers my name and clasps her hands behind my neck, squeezing her body tighter against mine.

Walking to the bed, I slowly lower her onto it, keeping my body hovering above hers. She still has her legs and arms around me, and when she rocks her hips, grinding against my dick, I growl her name in warning. Dragging my nose along her jaw, I inhale her sweet scent and kiss her ear before whispering, "If I didn't know any better, I'd swear you were trying to get me to slam into you. Is that what you want?" I nibble and kiss her skin, sucking on her earlobe and grazing my teeth along her skin. "You want me to tear you apart, little one?"

I give a wicked laugh when I hear her soft gasp and feel her legs tighten around me in an effort to close them and protect her sweet virgin pussy from the big cock that's knocking at the damn door.

"Yeah, I didn't think so. Be a good girl, Natalya, and let me do this the right way. I know what you want, and I know what you need, so stop being so defiant and let me give it to you."

"I'm not being defiant," she argues. "I just want you inside me."

"And I will be, sweet girl, but first I'm going to get you ready for me."

"I feel pretty damn ready."

I laugh at her tone and give her earlobe a soft bite. "Not even close, baby. Want to guess how I know that?"

"How?"

I lift up and meet her eyes. “Because you’re still able to form words.”

Her mouth opens like she’s trying to come up with a smartass comment, but then it closes when she realizes she doesn’t have one.

“Wow, stunned into silence. First time for everything, I guess.”

This time when she opens her mouth I’m pretty sure she knows exactly what she’s going to say, but I don’t give her the chance. As soon as she parts her lips, I press my mouth against hers and kiss her like I’ll never be able to get enough, and I won’t. No matter how many times I taste her, it will never be enough. That’s not going to stop me from trying, though. My tongue delves inside, licking and claiming every part of her mouth as mine. I told her I wanted to mark her body, and I meant it. After tonight, there won’t be an inch of her body that I haven’t touched in some way. It’s all or nothing when it comes to her, and I want it all.

Her nipples drag along my chest as I rock my hips, sliding the length of my cock along her slit. She digs her heels into my ass, meeting my movements so I’m hitting her where she needs it and whimpering into my mouth when I run my head over her swollen clit. I give her tongue one last suck and then kiss my way down her neck, sucking and licking and biting her delicate skin until I reach her breasts. They rise and fall with her heavy breathing. The sight of her heaving chest, nipples so hard they must be aching, pulls a groan from my body as my hips speed up. The perky fullness of her tits has me enthralled. Every time I thrust up against her, they bounce in a way that has me fucking hypnotized.

Catching one bouncing nipple between my lips, I suck her in, filling my mouth with her soft flesh, gorging on her sweet body and making her arch her back off the bed and fist my hair. She moans my name, and it’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard. Flattening my tongue, I run it over her sensitive skin, flicking it against her nipple at the same time as I run the head of my cock over her clit.

“Fuck,” she whimpers, fisting my hair tighter. “Don’t you dare stop.”

I give her a soft bite, reminding her that I don’t like to take orders, but all she does is laugh and say, “I told you you’d get used to it. Now keep doing what you’re doing and make me come.”

If it were anyone else, I’d be walking out the damn door, but it’s Natalya, and I’d do anything for her. I’m still me, though, so I can’t resist giving her one last hard suck, slowly pulling back until her wet nipple pops

from my mouth. Bringing my face to hers, I tease her clit with the head of my cock.

“Don’t stop what?” I ask, looking down at her heavy-lidded eyes and flushed cheeks. She’s soaking wet, and I’m dripping pre-cum, so it’s easy to run my length along all her lit-up nerve endings, so fucking slippery. It would be so easy to part her lips and press into her, but I resist the strong urge and keep teasing her. I circle my hips again, watching as she parts her lips on a gasp. “Don’t stop this?”

“Don’t be mean, Dominic,” she pouts, and it’s so goddamn cute I can’t help but laugh.

Leaning down, I kiss her gently. “I could never be mean to you, *principessa*. Do you have any idea how many times I’m going to make you come tonight?”

She shakes her head, letting out another moan when I stroke her clit harder, bringing her right to the edge. Her body shakes and she clutches me tighter, desperate for her release.

Sucking her top lip, I smile against her and whisper, “Let me show you just how nice I can be.”

Her whimper fills the space around us, and as sexy as it is, it’s not whimpers I want to hear. I want screams. I want my name on her lips as she comes harder than she ever has in her life. Rocking harder against her, the friction builds, and I know she’s only seconds away.

“Come for me, *principessa*,” I growl against her lips. “Let me hear how much you love coming on my cock.”

As soon as the words are out of my mouth, she’s bucking up against me, back arching, body tense, and a look of shocked amazement on her beautiful face right before she screams my name and lets go. The wet heat of her release hits my cock, coating me and soaking me so goddamn good. The slippery, erotic sounds fill the room, and I have to grit my teeth to keep from joining her. Her pussy lips part against my shaft, and I can feel her clenching around me, begging me to slide in and fill her to the point of pain.

“Fucking hell,” I growl, knowing I can’t take much more. She’s still in the throes of her orgasm when I position myself against her tight opening. I could stretch her with my fingers, but I don’t want to risk breaking her hymen. I want to do it with my cock. The thought of her blood marking my skin awakens something inside me—something primal, something

possessive, and, if I'm being honest, something that should probably remain asleep because the wildness of it isn't something I think I can contain.

Cupping her face with one hand, I stretch my fingers along her skin, holding her in place as I slowly start to slide into her.

"Eyes on me, *principessa*. I want to see you when I make you mine."

Her blue eyes are glazed. She's still drunk on her orgasm, but she gives a soft nod and digs her fingers into my shoulders, clinging to me as I very slowly slide the head of my cock into her. Her body stiffens right as her pussy clamps down and tries like hell to prevent me from sinking in even further. She hisses out a breath, digging her pretty pink nails into my skin, but all it does is make me harder. I'm torn between wanting to tear into her and wanting to be as gentle as I can be. She's so much smaller than me, petite and fragile compared to my brute strength, and it brings out two warring sides of myself—the violent mafia don and the man who's desperately in love with the woman shaking beneath me. They both want her, and I'm left playing referee between the two.

Resisting the urge to brutally slam into her and claim her with one hard thrust, I very slowly slide in another inch, feeling her soft inner walls tense and then finally give way as something tears inside her. Her blue eyes widen, boring into mine as her brows furrow and her lips thin from the pain of her small body making room for me. She feels impossibly tight. Her wet heat clenches around my head, trying to force me out, but instead I give her another inch, because this is mine, and her body needs to learn that.

She slowly opens for me just like I knew she would. Leaning closer, I kiss her gently, feeling the tears hit the hand that's still cupping her cheek.

"You're mine," I whisper against her lips, "and you're spreading so good for me, *principessa*."

"You're too big," she whispers back, digging her nails into my skin even harder.

I smile and bring my hand down to grab her leg, hiking it up so my hand is splayed across the back of her thigh and her knee is up by our chests. Gripping her tighter, I spread her wider, moving her knee to the side so she's laid bare before me. Looking down, I groan at the sight. I'm barely inside her, and her bare pussy lips are clamped down on me, her arousal dripping down my shaft, and when I pull back, I see streaks of blood along my dick.

“Jesus,” I growl, sliding into her deeper. “I want to see you taking every inch of me, *principessa*, every goddamn inch.”

“You’ll never fit,” she warns me.

I give her a wink and bring my hand between us, pressing the pad of my thumb against her clit. I roll her sensitive skin in a slow circle, watching the way her pupils dilate at my touch, the way her hips instinctively rock up for more, and the way her exhale becomes a whimper.

“Pay attention, sweetheart. I’m about to prove you wrong.”

Without giving her a chance to respond, I pinch her clit softly and rock my hips, sinking into her wet heat before pulling back out. I fuck her so goddamn gently with half my cock, feeling her body slowly start to accept me, to relax and open up for me.

“You’re so beautiful,” I groan, running my eyes over her, wanting to see every part of her at once but knowing it’s impossible. I watch her pussy take my cock and then watch the way her stomach tenses with each thrust and the way her hips rock up to meet mine, the way her breasts softly bounce with each gentle thrust, and then I focus on her gorgeous face. She’s no longer crying, but I can see the dried tear streaks on her skin and the way she’s still tense, still finding her way through the pain to the pleasure that’s starting to drown everything else out.

“That’s right,” I encourage her. “Focus on the pleasure, not the pain.”

I give her another inch and use two fingers to spread her open, pulling back the hood of her clit and exposing every sensitive nerve ending to the thick shaft that’s driving in and out of her.

“Oh god,” she gasps, clinging to me like her life depends on it.

“I’ll be whoever the hell you want me to be, *principessa*.” I rock into her even slower, letting her feel the soft, wet drag of my cock along her exposed clit. “I’ll be your god, I’ll be your devil, I’ll be your whole fucking world. Whatever you want, that’s what I’ll be.”

I know she’s close. Her inner walls are already trembling around me, and when I lower my head, she fists the back of my hair and pulls me closer, covering my mouth with hers and kissing me with a hunger that matches my own. She’s ravenous, and I’m more than ready to satisfy her.

Our tongues clash for dominance, both of us wanting and needing more, but the closer she gets to her orgasm, the more she submits, letting me take the lead. I drag my tongue along the roof of her mouth, and she lets out the sweetest whimper, opening even wider for me. I’m almost all the way

inside her now, each thrust going a little bit deeper, and when I feel her body start to tense, I slam in all the way, burying myself inside her. Her pussy spasms around my cock, gripping me tighter, begging me to follow her over the edge, but by some miracle I manage to resist the pull of her sweet body. I'm not done with her yet.

"Guess who fit?" I tease the words over her lips, watching as she arches her back when another wave of the orgasm hits her.

I rock harder into her. "Do you feel that, *principessa*? Do you feel how wide I'm spreading you?"

"Yes," she moans, fisting my hair to the point of pain as her heel digs into the back of my thigh, using me for leverage so she can angle her hips and take me deeper.

"Good fucking girl," I groan, loving the way she smiles at my praise. "This is the only cock you're ever going to have inside you, sweetheart." I run my tongue over the seam of her lips and whisper, "Say it, *principessa*. I need to hear you say it."

"Your cock is the only one that will ever be inside me, Dominic."

Her words are ragged, panted out with each hard thrust I'm given her, and hearing them makes me fucking feral. I take her hard, harder than I had intended for her first time, but she's right there with me, moaning my name and scratching the hell out of my back as she chases her third orgasm. This time when she screams my name into our kiss and lets go, I go with her.

Pleasure unlike anything I've ever experienced before consumes me. I cup the back of her head and snake my other arm under her, wanting our bodies as tightly connected as possible. My cock pulses as I come inside a woman for the first time in my life, and it's fucking euphoric. There's nothing between us—just my cock shooting into her and her tight pussy taking every goddamn drop I'm giving her.

"Natalya," I growl, holding her tighter. She presses her face against my neck, clutching me just as fiercely. This goes so far beyond fucking. I'm giving her a piece of myself that I've never given anyone before, a piece that I'll never get back. I feel more exposed than I've ever been, and I'm surprised by how much it doesn't bother me. I want to give every part of myself to her. I want her to see me as I really am. Just me. Not the mafia don, not the Alessi name, and not the man who's friends with her dad. Just me. The man who's completely in love with her, the man who's just made her his whole world.

Even after I'm completely spent, I keep myself buried inside her, not ready to break the connection. Her fingers lazily run through my hair as she kisses first along my neck and then up my cheek until finally pressing her lips to mine in a soft, languid kiss of a woman who's completely and utterly satisfied. I can't help but feel proud and smile against her lips.

"I know I don't have anything to compare this to," she whispers, "but that's not normal, right? Or is it always like this?"

I hear the worry in her voice, the doubt and insecurities, and I want nothing more than to take them all away. Lifting up, I cup her face and stroke her cheek with my thumb.

"No, *principessa*. It's never been like this for me. No one has ever made me feel the way you do. Nothing and no one could ever compare to this." I rock my hips gently, still semi-hard inside her and groan at how good she feels. "Being inside you is pure heaven, and I never want to leave."

"I don't think I'm going to be able to walk tomorrow."

When I let out a soft laugh, she raises a brow at me. "I'm not kidding."

"I know you're not, sweetheart, and I wish I could say I'm sorry, but the truth is I'm not. I love that you're going to be sore. I love that every step you take will remind you of this moment." I kiss her gently, giving her top lip a soft suck. "And I love that it will be a constant reminder that you're mine, every single part of you."

She smiles around a yawn that she tries to hide, but I notice it, I notice everything about her, and I know how worn out she is. I did not go easy on her, and she looks like she's seconds away from falling asleep. Not wanting to slide out of her, but knowing she needs to rest, I force myself to pull back and slowly ease out of her. Even though I'm only semi-hard and trying like hell to be gentle, she still winces. When I'm free of her body, my first instinct is to slide back in, because now that I've been inside her, being separated from her will never feel right. I'm always going to wish our bodies were connected and that I could feel her tight pussy wrapped around me.

I feel the loss of her, but when I look down and see how swollen and tender she is and the streaks of blood that still cover my cock, I know there's no way I can inflict that kind of pain on her.

"Wait here, *principessa*."

I give her another kiss and then pull the covers back before tucking her in bed and walking into the bathroom. I can feel her eyes on my ass the

whole way, but I don't bother covering up. I let her stare at what belongs to her. Wetting a washcloth with warm water, I bring it back out to her. I don't bother cleaning myself up. I want her blood on me. I'd keep it on me forever if I could. I'm already getting hard again thinking about the reason I'm covered in blood. I love that I'm her first, but I love that I'm her last even more.

Her eyes are only half open when I crawl back into bed, spooning her from behind. Grabbing her thigh, I lift her leg and press the warm cloth against her tender skin.

"Thank you," she whispers. "That feels really good."

I kiss her temple and gently cup her pussy so the warm cloth stays pressed against her. "I'll always take care of you, Natalya. You're mine now, sweetheart, and I always take care of what's mine."

She smiles as her eyes drift shut. I kiss her again and slide an arm under her so I can tuck her body closer against mine. She's so much smaller than me, but she fits like she was made just for me.

"Rest, *principessa*. I'll be here when you wake."

She gives a soft moan and relaxes further into me. I hold her until her breathing deepens and evens out, and then I keep holding her because I don't want to let her go. I have no idea what's going to happen when Lev finds out, but I do know that I'm never letting his daughter go.

Chapter 12

Natalya

When I wake a few hours later, the first thing I notice is the ache between my legs. I roll over to lie on my back and groan at the twinge of pain that hits me. My god, it feels like I've been fucked by a battering ram. I knew Dominic was big, but nothing could have prepared me for this. My cheeks heat up at the memory, and even though I'm sore, I wouldn't change a second of what we shared. After the initial shock of his size, he'd made sure I was feeling too much pleasure to notice the pain. I'd had no idea anything could feel like that. It had felt like we'd become one person, like we'd joined ourselves to each other in a way that can't ever be severed.

Sitting up and looking around, I notice that the man I now consider my other half is nowhere to be seen. Doubts start to creep into the edges of my mind, and as much as I try not to, I can't help but worry that maybe this had meant more to me than him. I have no idea how he is with other women. He said being with me was different, but maybe he says that to everyone. I don't have any experience with this, and it's not like I can call my mom and ask her if this is normal. God, just the thought of my parents finding out about us has me breaking out in a light sweat. They're going to find out, but I can't bring myself to think about it right now. That's a worry for another day.

Scooting out of bed, I slowly make my way to the bathroom. I'm scared to death that peeing is going to burn, but it doesn't hurt like I thought it would, so I'm guessing I'm just really tender but not torn. I go ahead and brush my teeth to freshen up and run a brush through my hair before pulling

on one of his T-shirts. I love wearing his clothes, and I can't resist holding the fabric to my nose and breathing in the scent of him.

I step out of the bathroom right as he opens the door and walks in. The sight of him stuns me, stealing my breath and freezing me in place. Gone is the Armani suit and perfectly polished look, and in its place is Dominic in a pair of jeans, black boots, and a tight, black T-shirt that hugs his broad chest and toned biceps, and if that wasn't sexy enough, he's wearing a baseball cap that's pulled low and worn in so it fits him perfectly.

"Wow," I whisper.

He gives me a big smile, the kind I've only ever seen on his face when he's looking at me, and drops the bags I hadn't even noticed onto the dresser. It takes a second for the smell to hit me, but when it does, my mouth starts to water. I know that delicious smell, the mix of herbs and red sauce.

"You didn't," I start to say, looking from him to the bag that has Mama Sofia's written across it.

His brown eyes meet mine as he lets out a soft laugh. Lifting his cap, he runs a hand through his hair, and if it was anyone else, I'd swear he was nervous. He tosses the ball cap onto the bed and starts to walk towards me.

"I've never seen you in anything so casual."

He gives me another smile and shrugs his broad shoulders. Standing in front of me, he towers over me even more than usual with his boots on.

"I had to make sure no one would recognize me. The don of the Alessi Mafia can't be seen walking into Mama Sofia's. Plus, Lucia would kill me, so you'd better not ever breathe a word of it. I had to sneak into my own home with those bags, so you better eat every damn bite."

I smile up at him. "You're such a food snob. Mama Sofia's is a nice place. Just because you don't have to be a millionaire to walk through the doors doesn't mean it's not a good place to eat."

He holds up his hands. "I never said that. I just find it hard to believe that you can get really good authentic Italian food in a place that uses plastic cutlery."

I laugh and shake my head. "You are so going to be eating your words in just a few minutes. I'll be expecting your heartfelt apology before the meal is over."

He cups my face and tilts my head up. His hand is hot on my skin, and just that small amount of contact is enough to make my heart start racing.

He leans down, putting his face close to mine. His thumb drags along my bottom lip, sending a warmth all through me.

“I’ll try my best to think of a proper apology, *principessa*.” His eyes run down my body, stopping when he sees the way my nipples are already straining against my shirt. “I love it when you wear my clothes. It’s another reminder that you’re mine and that you belong to me.”

I should probably be offended by his words, but I’m not. I love how possessive he is with me, and I want nothing more than to be his, just as much as he’s mine. It goes both ways, and I could never settle for anything less.

His other hand slides down between us until he slips it under the shirt I’m wearing. Instead of gripping me tightly, he drags the pads of two fingers along my sensitive folds in a featherlight touch that has me parting my lips on a soft moan.

“How sore are you?”

His fingers dance along my skin, making me wish I wasn’t still so tender. “Pretty sore,” I admit.

The smirk he gives me is equal parts sin and sexy. He drags one finger slowly up my slit before circling my clit. The touch is whisper-soft, and when he pulls his hand away, I grip his upper arms, not wanting him to leave.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, you’ll be coming again soon enough, but you need to eat and you need to rest.”

“I don’t need to rest, Dominic. I’m not sick. I just lost my virginity.”

He gives me a wink and lets out another deep laugh. “You need to rest so your body can heal. I want to fuck you again, *principessa*, but I refuse to do it when you’re still so tender.”

Heat flushes to every part of my body. He sees the blush that’s spread across my face and neck and gives another sexy wink before picking me up like I weigh nothing. I wrap my arms and legs around him, loving how easily we fit together. Resting one hand on his cheek, my thumb runs over the light beard he hasn’t bothered to shave yet.

“When I woke up alone, I was afraid that maybe you’d changed your mind,” I admit, watching his face soften and his brown eyes fill with a sadness that surprises me.

“I’m sorry you worried. I should have left you a note.”

Keeping one arm securely under my ass, he brings the other one up to cup the back of my head, threading his fingers through my hair and pulling me closer so our lips are almost touching.

“Me changing my mind about how I feel is not something you need to worry about, *principessa*. I’m not a fickle man. I don’t claim to have feelings only to change my mind a few hours later.”

When he presses his lips to mine, the kiss is slow and deep. Without words, he exposes himself to me, letting me see the truth of things. Even though he hasn’t said the words, I feel the love in his kiss, the longing and the need, and I give him the same in return. I don’t hide how I feel about him. I open my mouth and hold him tighter, because the truth is I’ve fallen just as hard for him as he has for me. There could never be anyone else. He’s completely ruined me for all other men. No one could ever compete with this man. With a groan, he pulls back and rests his forehead against mine.

“Please don’t ever doubt me again. You’re mine just as much as I’m yours.”

“But what about other women?” I voice the one fear that refuses to completely leave. “You’ve been single your whole life, Dominic, and now you’re just going to give that up?”

“Yes,” he says without hesitation.

“You’re going to turn away all the gorgeous women who probably line up on a daily basis for a chance to be with you?”

“Yes.” He says it again like it’s a no-brainer and he can’t understand my confusion. “Why would I want to be with them when I have you?”

I don’t even bother trying to answer that question, so he keeps talking.

“You’re all I want, and I don’t feel the faintest desire to be with anyone else. Why on earth would I risk losing you by cheating on you with some random woman that I care absolutely nothing about?”

He’s so sincere when he says it, and even though the man is forty-three and never been in a serious, monogamous relationship, I don’t doubt what he’s telling me. I can either spend every second I have with him worried and paranoid, or I can trust him at his word. I know what kind of life I want with him, and it doesn’t involve me second-guessing every damn word he says. Taking a breath, I push all my fears aside and bring my lips to his. I kiss him just as slowly as he’d kissed me, drawing it out and savoring the taste of him. His tongue slides along mine, but he doesn’t take over. He lets

me be in charge, even though it goes against his natural instincts. Dominic isn't a submissive man, but he submits for me. That kind of power goes straight to my head, and I can't help but deepen the kiss and rock against him, drunk on the knowledge that the head of the Alessi Mafia is mine and only mine.

He groans against my mouth when I reach down and pull my shirt up so my bare pussy is flush against his T-shirt. I know I'm marking the black fabric, and knowing it has me growing wetter and grinding even harder.

"Fuck," he growls, pulling back on a pant. "You're damn hard to resist." His eyes run over me, darkening when he watches me rock against him again. "I refuse to fuck you right now, not when you're so sore and not when I'm barely hanging on to my sanity. I won't risk tearing you to shreds, *principessa*, so stop fucking tempting me to."

Dominic brings out a wild part of myself that I never knew existed, so instead of heeding his warning, I roll my hips in a slow rhythm, feeling the lines of his rock-hard abs beneath the now wet fabric of his shirt.

"Jesus Christ," he groans, raising his eyes to mine. "I run one of the most powerful mafias in the world, and I'm being brought to my knees by a goddamn teenager."

There's no anger in his voice, more like he's just completely stunned by it, and so am I. Ours is a love that shouldn't be, but now that I've found him, I'll be damned if I ever let him go.

I smile and give him a quick kiss. "I'm just as stunned by it as you are."

He laughs, the deep carefree kind that I'm learning is just reserved for me, and carries me to a door in the corner that I had assumed lead to another closet. He opens it, revealing a gorgeous sunroom. Windows line the walls and there's a set of comfy-looking chairs and a small table. There's room for a lot more, but it looks like he doesn't spend much time in here, which is a shame because even though it's dark outside, it's absolutely gorgeous.

"This is amazing," I tell him.

He smiles and kisses my cheek. "Look up."

I return his smile before tipping my head back and letting out a soft gasp. Right above us is a huge skylight that covers most of the room's ceiling.

"Wow," I whisper. "Turn out the light."

I hear his soft laugh, but he gives me what I want. Still carrying me, he walks over and shuts off the light before standing in the middle of the room. We're still in the city, but Dominic has enough space here to allow for an unobstructed view of the sky. It doesn't look like the night sky at the farmhouse, but it's still beautiful and giving me a view of the stars and the crescent moon that looks like it's smiling down on us.

"This is amazing. Why was the door shut? Don't you spend any time in here?"

"Not really," he says.

I look back down at him. "But it's gorgeous in here." I look around at the nearly empty room. "You need one of those hammock chairs, though, so you can get comfy and watch the sky."

The corner of his mouth lifts up in an easy smile. "This may come as a shock, but I'm kind of a workaholic, and I don't really *get comfy*."

He says the last two words like they're completely foreign to him. I give him another quick kiss before he sets me down in one of the chairs.

"We're going to need to work on that," I tell him.

He just laughs and leaves to go grab the food. My mouth starts to water as soon as he comes back and the smell of lasagna and garlic bread hits me. He turns a lamp on in the corner so there's enough light for us to eat with, but not so bright that I can't still see the stars and moon above us.

Setting out the food, he hands me my plate and then lets out a deep sigh before holding out the plastic fork it came with.

I grab it and smile. "Don't be such a snob."

He raises a dark brow at me and grabs his own plastic fork. I reach over and put a large piece of garlic bread on his plate.

"That's the best part." Too excited to eat, I sit still and watch him. "Try it."

He laughs at my enthusiasm and grabs the piece of bread. Looking at it, he gives it a sniff, and when I roll my eyes at him, he laughs again and finally takes a big bite. He chews slowly, and the second I see his eyes widen ever so slightly, I know I've won. I sit back and stab a piece of lasagna onto my fork.

"I'll be expecting that apology soon."

He keeps chewing, trying like hell to not show how much he's enjoying the bread, but when he takes a bite of lasagna, there's no denying the groan of appreciation. I laugh and take another bite of my own food.

"I don't understand," he says in between a few more bites. "How the hell is this so good and I never knew about it?"

"You were too busy dropping hundreds of dollars at your fancy-pants restaurant." I reach for my drink and take a big sip. "Let me guess, they have valet and a gorgeous hostess that meets you at the door like you're the most special guest in the whole damn restaurant, maybe she even has an Italian name to make it all seem more authentic?"

"The food is good there," he says, refusing to admit it might be subpar.

"But not as good as this," I say, holding up my fork, the plastic tines stuffed with lasagna. "I dare you to deny it with a straight face."

He tries, I'll give him that. His sexy mouth tries like hell to not lift, but when I don't back down from the stare-off, he finally relents with a big smile and a soft laugh.

"Yeah, it's pretty damn good and better than *Mangia Bene*." He points a finger at me and adds, "But I won't say it's better than Lucia's cooking."

"I would never ask you to," I tell him, secretly loving his loyalty to the woman who's been cooking for him since he was a kid. "And I'm not sure it's better than hers anyway, but it's a close second."

He takes another big bite and closes his eyes in appreciation.

"A hidden gem."

He opens his eyes just enough to give me a quick wink before he goes back to savoring the meal he was convinced wouldn't satisfy his Italian tastebuds. We eat in a comfortable silence, and I can't take my eyes off him. There's something about seeing him so casual that makes my heart fill with affection for him. This man consumes me when he's near. He takes over all my senses, pushing everything else aside until I'm left with only him.

Sensing me staring at him, he smiles and turns his brown eyes to mine. "You're gloating, *principessa*."

I laugh and shake my head. "I am not. I knew I was right all along, so there's really no reason to gloat."

"So modest," he teases before finishing off the last of his garlic bread.

I use my stuffed fork to point at him. "I like you like this. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love the Armani suits, and you look sexy as hell in them, but I like this too."

He gives me one of his full smiles. "Sexy as hell, huh?"

"Yes, you know you are, Dominic. You've probably been told that since birth."

“Those were the first words I remember my mother saying to me.”

I laugh and shake my head at him. “Tell me about your family.”

He sighs and grabs the whiskey he’d poured for himself earlier. “Not much to tell. My mom died a few years before Isabella was murdered. My sister was my dad’s favorite, and her death nearly killed him. I don’t have any other siblings, and I’ve put everything I have into the family business.”

He’s quiet as he takes another drink, but then he reaches out and rests one of his large hands on my bare thigh, giving it a soft squeeze.

“I’ve lived a very empty personal life, Natalya, but I was content with it. I kept myself isolated and never let anyone in.” His eyes run over me as his thumb softly strokes my skin. “I can’t imagine doing that with you.”

“Good,” I whisper, resting my hand on top of his and interlacing our fingers. “I don’t ever want you to hide yourself from me.”

“You may not like everything you see, *principessa*. You look at me like I’m not a monster, but there are many people who would disagree with you. I’ve done so many bad things, killed so many people, and I’ve never lost a second of sleep over it. I am who I am, and there’s no changing it. I can’t walk away from this life.”

“I would never ask you to.”

I get up and close the short distance between us, climbing into his lap so I’m straddling him. He groans and slides his hands up my thighs and under my shirt so he can cup my bare ass.

“I know who you are, Dominic, and in case you’ve forgotten, I know what this lifestyle is like. I would never ask you to leave what you’ve worked so damn hard for.”

“I know how much you hate having bodyguards and your lack of freedom. If you think that’s going to change when you’re with me, you’re very wrong. I’m going to be worse than your dad.”

I start to laugh, but he just raises a brow at me. “I’m being serious, *principessa*.”

“I know you are,” I tell him while patting his chest.

He looks down at the placating chest pat I’m giving him and then quirks a brow at me. “God, you’re going to be a handful, aren’t you?”

“Possibly, but I’ll try not to be,” I say with a laugh.

He smiles and shakes his head. “Of all the women in the world, I had to fall for a smartass Russian.”

“I’m half American,” I remind him.

“Your dad is Russian enough to counteract that.”

At the mention of my dad, I feel a quick twinge of guilt. Dominic notices and gives my ass a soft squeeze. “Look at me, Natalya.”

I bring my gaze back to his, and as soon as our eyes meet, I know I’d do anything to be with this man. I don’t want to hurt my dad, but I can’t let Dominic go. I refuse to.

“We’ll find a way to make this work.”

He studies me, making sure I believe him, and when I give him a small smile and nod my head, he relaxes and pulls me closer. I’m still not wearing panties, and my tender skin rubs against his jeans, making me wince and moan at the same time. He lets out a soft laugh and massages my ass in a way that makes me want to arch my back and purr like a damn cat.

“I was wrong about Mama Sofia’s, and I believe I said I’d try to think of a way to apologize.”

“You did say that, yes.”

He keeps massaging me, and right when I’m convinced his apology is going to be the world’s best ass rub, he picks me up and sets me back down on the large, leather chair. He puts me sideways so I’m lying down with my legs hanging over the padded arm. It gives me the perfect view of the skylight above us. His hands run up my legs to grip my thighs and spread me wider. Reaching down I grab the bottom of my shirt and lift it higher, exposing myself to him.

“So fucking beautiful,” he groans, running his eyes over me. He kisses his way up my inner thigh as he whispers, “I’m going to kiss your pussy better, *principessa*. I’m going to lick and suck every inch of your tender flesh until all you feel is pleasure, and then I’m going to do it again and again and again.”

I moan his name when he runs his tongue up the crease of my inner thigh, so close to where I need him. His light beard tickles my skin, and I can’t help but arch up for more. His hungry mouth laps at my skin, kissing and sucking and marking a slow path to my center.

“Watch the stars while I eat your pretty pussy. Let’s see how many times I can make you come before you pass out.”

At first I think he’s joking, but when I lift my head to see him, the intense look in his eyes makes it clear he’s not. I watch in fascination as he reaches over and grabs his whiskey. He takes another long drink, but when he sets the glass back down, he’s holding a piece of ice between his teeth.

The feral look in his eyes has me lifting up even more, but before I can scurry away, he grabs my hips, using his tattooed forearms to press against my thighs and hold me firmly in place.

“Mm-mm,” he murmurs, shaking his head to let me know I won’t be moving anytime soon.

Ducking his head, he pushes the ice back so all I feel are his cold lips as he very slowly kisses a line up my tender slit.

“Fuck,” I moan, dropping my head back again. The coolness feels amazing against my sore pussy as he kisses every inch of me, soothing my aching body in a way I hadn’t been expecting. I gasp when he circles my clit with the ice, chasing the motion with a soft suck of his cool lips. The sensations are dizzying, fluctuating between cold ice and the heat of his mouth, and all I can do is thread my fingers into his thick hair and let him do whatever the hell he wants as I look up at the stars shining down on us.

He acts like we have all the time in the world, like there’s nowhere else on earth he’d rather be than right here between my legs, and when the first orgasm hits me, I scream his name and rock against his talented mouth, completely and utterly lost to him. He keeps going, working me through the orgasm only to throw me right into another one. He’s relentless in his pursuit of my pleasure, and I’m taken aback by it. This is all about me, about making me feel good, and he’s putting his heart and soul into it and giving me everything he has.

I lose track of the orgasms. They run together, creating an endless wave of ecstasy that I happily drown in. Stars dot my vision, and I can’t tell if they’re real or caused by my erratic breathing. The last thing I remember is a heavy warmth falling over me, seeping into every part of my body and the sound of his deep laugh that seems so very, very far away.

When I wake, I’m back in his bed and I notice two things immediately—I’m naked and Dominic’s a cuddler. His large body is curled around mine, arm draped across my chest in a tight hug with his head resting above mine on the pillow. I can tell by his breathing that he’s asleep, so I keep still, not wanting to wake him.

While he sleeps, I try to work through my memories of last night. I remember the meal and the amazing oral sex under the skylight, but then it starts to grow fuzzy. I remember seeing stars and how everything started to fade away, but I don’t remember getting naked, and I don’t remember getting into bed. My body is still sore, but it’s not bad and it feels better

than it did yesterday, so I know there's no way we had sex. I'm still trying to puzzle it out when Dominic tightens his grip on me and tenses his body in a long stretch.

"Morning, *principessa*," he murmurs against my neck before giving it a kiss.

"Morning." I hug the tattooed arm that's still firmly wrapped around me. "How did you know I was awake?"

"I could tell by your breathing, and you were tracing my octopus tattoo."

"I was?" I look down at where I'd been absentmindedly stroking his skin. "I'm sorry. I didn't even realize I was doing that. I was trying to not wake you."

"Don't apologize. If you're awake, then I want to be awake."

Scooting me closer so my ass is pressed up against him, my eyes widen when I feel what he'd been hiding from me. Damn. Yeah, I'd definitely know if we had sex last night. Your body doesn't quickly forget a cock like that. A sexual encounter with Dominic is one you carry around for a few days.

I turn my head to face him, not at all surprised to find that he looks adorable minutes after waking up. Tousled hair, lazy grin, dark facial hair that's even thicker, and a mischievous glint in his dark eyes that lets me know he's thinking all kinds of sinful thoughts about me.

"You look way too damn good in the morning," I mutter, making him laugh. "How did I get naked and how did we get back in bed?"

He smiles and rolls onto his back, lifting his arms in a stretch that gives me a mouthwatering view of his chest and abs and not even remotely embarrassed by the obscene way his erection is tenting the sheets.

"You passed out after I made you come multiple times, and I prefer you naked."

I turn on my side and lift up onto my elbow so I can see him better. "You got me naked after I passed out?"

He smiles even bigger. "I did, yes."

"And then what?"

He doesn't even pretend to look guilty when he says, "Then I jerked off onto your perfect little body and carried you to bed."

I let out a surprised laugh. "How the hell did I sleep through that?"

“You were very tired, sweetheart. You came so many times.” He yanks the sheet down and drags a finger up my thigh until he’s grazing the soft skin between my legs. “You were so wet, *principessa*, and I swallowed every drop you had to give. Do you feel better today? Did the ice help?”

My body flushes at the memory of how damn good that had felt. “Yes, it helped. I’m not as sore as I was yesterday.”

“Good.” He gives me a wink and runs his eyes over me. “I’m more than happy to do that anytime you need me to.”

Having a naked Dominic inches away from me is a temptation that’s impossible to resist. Leaning closer, I kiss along his sculpted bicep as he sighs and cups the back of my head.

“Where did you come on me?” I ask in between kisses.

I hear his soft laugh as I make my way up his shoulder.

“Everywhere,” he admits, laughing again. “I can’t fucking control myself around you. I came on your pussy and then on your stomach and then I covered your perfect tits in my cum.” He hooks a finger under my chin and tilts my face up so he can see me. “You look beautiful wearing my seed, *principessa*. If I had my way, it’s the only thing you’d ever wear.” He drags his finger back down my leg until he’s trailing it along the arch of my foot. “And maybe those sexy pink heels.”

“You really liked those.”

“I love them, and you’re going to wear them for me soon.”

“I am?”

“You are.”

He’s just about to close the distance between us when his phone buzzes on the nightstand. He groans and reaches over to grab it. When he sees who’s calling, he lets out a heavy sigh and looks over at me.

“I swear your dad has some sort of sixth sense.” He gives me a wink before he answers with an easygoing, “Hey, Lev. Any news?”

While he listens to what my dad is telling him, he wraps an arm under me and pulls me closer so my body is nestled up against his. His fingers run through my hair while I listen to half their conversation. At one point, I feel Dominic’s body tense before he says, “Are you sure about that? What if he’s lying? I still think this option is the safest.”

After a few more minutes, he says a quick bye and then tosses the phone aside.

“Is everything okay?”

I'm not ready for the answer when he gives it to me.
"He's on his way to pick you up."

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Chapter 13

Dominic

The hurt look on Natalya's face completely guts me.

"*Principessa*," I say, but she's having none of it. She swats my hand away and sits up, not caring that she's naked and giving me a full view of everything.

"So that's it then? You're handing me back over to my dad now?"

"It's not like that."

"Then what is it like? Why didn't you tell him you wanted me to stay here?"

"I did, but he has new information."

She looks hurt, and I hate that I'm the one who's made her feel this way. When I reach out for her, she pulls back, and it breaks my heart to see her do it.

"Look at me, Natalya."

When she keeps her eyes lowered, refusing to give me what I want, I grab her hips and scoot her back to me so she's lying on the bed with my body hovering over hers.

"Look at me," I say again.

She fights it for a few seconds, because my girl's a fighter and doesn't like to give in, but eventually she brings her blue eyes to mine.

"This is *not* permanent. Do you understand me?"

"I understand that it's what you're saying."

"That's not the answer I want."

"Yeah, but it's the one you're getting."

I laugh at the attitude she's giving me and press my body to hers, letting her feel my weight. She's not going anywhere unless I want her to, and

right now there's nowhere else I want her to be.

Cupping her face, I run my thumb along her flushed cheek. "Do you have any idea how badly I want to keep you here?"

"Then keep me."

Her words gut me. She makes it sound so simple when it's anything but. I run my thumb over her lips and tell her the truth. "I'm planning on it, *principessa*. You're mine, and I'm not letting you go."

"Yes, you are," she argues. "My dad's on his way to get me, right? That means you're letting me go, Dominic."

"I'm *temporarily* allowing a separation," I correct, "but it's only because I think it's the safest option for you right now."

"So that's just your decision to make? I don't even get a say in it?"

"No, you don't." I ignore the angry look she's giving me, even if she does look sexy as hell when she's pissed. "When it comes to your safety, my word will always be the final one."

"I don't even know what to say to that."

I give her a wink that has her narrowing her eyes even more. "You don't need to say anything because it wouldn't do any good. I get the final word when it comes to your safety, *principessa*. Always."

"And what made you decide that I'm safer somewhere else, or am I not allowed to even ask that?"

I give her pouty mouth a quick kiss. "You can always ask me anything you want. It doesn't mean I'll answer, but you can always ask."

"You're impossible."

I laugh and sneak in another kiss. "I warned you that I would be worse than your dad."

"I was hoping you were joking."

"I never joke about things like that, but I will answer your question. I don't know all the details yet, but the man they questioned told them that if they couldn't get a hit on you, then they should go after your siblings."

Her body freezes at the thought of something happening to her younger sister and brother.

"And if that didn't work, then they were to start on your cousins. It's only a matter of time before another attack happens, and having you all spread out is making it difficult for your family to protect everyone. I need to help them, and if my men and I aren't here to protect you, then it's not safe for you to stay here. It's not going to take the Zolotov Bratva long to

figure out that our families work closely together, and once they do, they'll look for you here."

I look down at her, willing her to see the truth in what I'm saying. "I need to know you're safe, and you need to let me do whatever the hell I need to do to make that happen. I won't lose you, Natalya. I fucking refuse to let that happen."

She sighs and lifts her hands to cup my face. "You're a hard man to stay angry at."

"Really? Most people find it very easy."

Her soft laugh releases the tension that's coiled around my heart.

"I'd better get ready to go then."

I know she's right, but the last thing I want to do is lift my body off hers. If there was any way I could guarantee her safety, I'd keep her here, but if the Zolotov Bratva attacks while I'm gone and most of my men aren't here, it's possible they could get to her. It's unlikely, but the possibility is there, and I'm not willing to risk her life. For now, it's safer if she's with her family. Lev said they were taking all their kids to the farmhouse and that they'll be surrounded by guards. No one knows about their secret house in the middle of nowhere. It's the safest place for her while I help her dad and uncles find these fuckers and take them out.

Her safety and how damn important it is to me is the only thing that gets me to roll off her sweet body. I stay on the bed, watching her walk naked into the bathroom, groaning at the sight of her bare ass before she closes the door, blocking my view of her. Forcing myself out of bed, I pull on the jeans and T-shirt from last night. I'll shower and put on a suit later. Right now, I don't want to waste a second of the few precious minutes I have left with her.

While she gets ready, I gather up the few things she has lying around. My plan was to hand them to her so she could put them in her bag, but I quickly decide I don't want to do that. Instead, I hang the pink dress she'd been wearing yesterday in my closet next to my rack of suits and line her sandals up next to my collection of Salvatore Ferragamo shoes.

I like seeing her things mixed with mine. Pleased with my decision, I leave the closet just as she's stepping out of the bathroom. She's in another summer dress, this one a pale blue that accentuates the color of her eyes, and all I can do is stare as she walks around the room, trying to find the things I just put away.

“Do you know where my sandals are?”

“They’re in my closet.”

She walks over, but I stop her from grabbing them. Keeping her hand in mine, I give it a squeeze and say, “I’m keeping them here, and the pink dress you wore yesterday.”

“But the only other pair of shoes I have are flip-flops. The sandals look better with this dress.”

I smile down at her. “I guess you’ll just have to make do.”

She tries to go around me, but I grab onto her waist and lift her up, pulling her tightly against my body.

“Let me keep them, *principessa*. I need to keep some part of you here.” I smile and nip at her bottom lip. “Plus, I know how much you love your shoes and dresses. This is proof that you’ll be coming back. I’m holding them hostage, sweetheart. You’ll get them back when I get you back.”

She hooks her legs behind my waist and clasps her hands behind my neck, smiling against my lips. I slip my hands under her dress so I can cup her ass, feeling the soft lace of her panties beneath my palms. She lets out a soft gasp when I press her back against the wall.

“I can’t say goodbye to you like this. If I’m going to watch you walk away, then it’s going to be on my terms.”

“And what terms are those?”

Her voice is breathy and low, and when I slide one hand lower, cupping her pussy from behind, I’m not at all surprised to feel that she’s already soaked through the thin scrap of fabric between her thighs. She lets out a whisper-soft moan when I drag my finger along her slit.

“You’re going to walk away from me sore and dripping my seed, *principessa*. It’s the only way I’ll be able to let you go.”

“Damn,” she whispers, making me smile.

“I need to feel you one last time before I have to say goodbye.” Using one hand, I hold her ass up and roughly unbutton my pants, pulling the zipper down and freeing my painfully hard cock in record time.

“I’d planned on giving you a few more days to rest, sweetheart, but we ran out of time.”

“I’m fine,” she quickly says, grabbing the bottom of her dress and lifting it up to give me better access.

“Someone’s eager,” I tease and nip at her top lip. I pull the plump lip into my mouth, giving it a suck while I push her panties aside and line

myself up. She's so fucking wet, dripping onto my head and making it nearly impossible for me to not slam into her.

"God, you make it difficult to do the right thing," I growl against her lips. "I'm trying to be gentle, but you're begging me with your body to be rough."

She lets out a soft whimper when I slide my head in. She grips me so fucking tightly, and I watch her beautiful face as she winces when I slide in deeper. I probably shouldn't love it as much as I do, but the truth is I love making her wince. I love seeing the flash of pain that crosses her face before it turns into pleasure. I love making my girl sore, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

"Fuck," I groan when I'm deeply seated inside her and the wet heat of her pussy is clamped down around me. Holding her still, I keep our bodies locked together while I slowly kiss her. She whimpers against my mouth, deepening the kiss and trying like hell to rock her hips. I tighten my grip on her, forcing her to be still, forcing her to feel every goddamn inch of me.

"How the fuck am I going to watch you walk away?" I whisper the question against her lips, but I don't give her a chance to answer. I rock out of her and thrust back in, stealing the breath from her lungs. She grips me tighter, her body and pussy clinging to me as I start to fuck her harder. I want to brand her with my body. When she leaves me today, she's going to feel like I'm right there with her. My scent will be on her skin, my marks will be on her hips from how tightly I'm gripping her, and my cock will have left its mark on her sweet pussy. She will ache from my touch, and I will ache from the loss of her.

"Dominic," she moans, gripping the back of my neck tighter. "I'm close. I'm so fucking close."

I feel her muscles tense beneath my hands. She's only seconds away, pinned against the wall and unable to move. All she can do is take what I'm giving her, and when she starts to come, I growl against her lips, "Good fucking girl," and then fuck her even harder. Her inner walls squeeze me tighter, pulling the orgasm from my body with each tremor her body gives. Being inside Natalya is all-consuming, my newest obsession, and something I'll never be able to get enough of.

I kiss her hard while my cock empties inside her and she shakes from the force of her orgasm. Her small body is limp in my arms, completely spent and trembling, but she doesn't let go. She lazily strokes the back of

my hair and kisses me so damn sweetly. I stay buried inside her, needing a few more precious seconds of us being locked together.

I pull back and rest my forehead against hers. "I give you my word, *principessa*, that this is temporary. I will get you as soon as this is over and bring you back here where you belong. You are *mine*, and your place is with me."

She gives a soft nod and whispers. "You won't change your mind?"

"Never."

I hug her against me and ghost my lips against hers, breathing in every one of her exhales, trying to get as much of her as I possibly can. I'm a goddamn glutton when it comes to her. I want every inch of her, and even then I know it won't be enough.

"Before you, I would never have called myself a sensitive man. I didn't think I was capable of romantic feelings, and I definitely wasn't aware of the obsessive, overprotective parts of me that were dead until you sparked them to life. You've changed me, *principessa*, and there's no going back."

With our bodies still connected, I bring my mouth to hers, letting her feel the truth of what I'm saying in the soft kiss I'm giving her.

"I love you," I whisper against her lips. "I'm not trying to scare you off, but I need you to know how I feel before you're separated from me. I don't want you worrying that I'm going to change my mind or that I'm going to forget about you and find someone else, because that will never happen, Natalya. I've never felt this way about anyone before, and I know myself well enough to know I never will again. You're it for me, *principessa*."

For a second I'm afraid I've gone too far, that I've exposed too much of myself and scared the hell out of her, but then her beautiful face breaks into a huge grin and she pulls me closer and kisses me with everything she has.

When I start to grow hard again inside her, she breaks our kiss and whispers, "I love you too, Dominic, and you better come back for me."

I can't stop the smile that spreads across my face at hearing those words come out of her kiss-swollen lips.

"You love me?"

She rolls her eyes at me and fights a grin. "A little bit."

"A little bit, huh?" I tease, rocking into her and ghosting my lips down her slender neck.

"Maybe more than a little," she admits with a moan when I nip at the crook of her neck.

I laugh and lick her soft skin before lifting back up to face her. “I promise I’m coming back for you, and I’ll miss you every second that you’re away from me.”

“I’ll miss you too.”

She sounds so damn sad when she says it, and I hate that I have to put her through this. The truth is it’s going to hurt me just as much as it hurts her. Hell, maybe even more. I like having her near me, in my room and in my bed. I love hearing her voice, and I love how she brings this house to life and makes it feel more like a home. It’s going to feel so goddamn empty without her.

With a sigh, I give her one more kiss and then slowly lift her off me. She winces, and I smile, because, god, it just never gets old.

“You don’t always have to look so damn proud about it.”

I laugh and set her down. Kneeling in front of her, I look up and say, “But I am so damn proud.”

She runs a hand through my hair, watching me as I slide my hands up her thighs and hook my fingers around her lacy panties before slowly pulling them off.

“Lift your dress and show me what’s mine, *principessa*.”

Bringing both hands to the bottom of her dress, she grips the fabric and slides it up, slowly revealing herself to me. I grip her thighs and spread her wider, wanting to see everything. She’s swollen and pink and dripping my cum.

“This is how you should always look for me.”

Unable to resist, I lean closer and lick her, pushing my seed back inside her as my tongue runs up her slit. She moans and rocks her hips, grinding gently against my mouth when I give her clit a soft suck.

“Keep my cum where it belongs, *principessa*.”

She nods and clenches her thighs together when I stand back up. Holding up her panties, I say, “I’m keeping these.” Bringing them to my face, I close my eyes and inhale the scent that I’m completely addicted to before shoving them into my pocket and tucking myself back into my jeans.

My phone buzzes, and I know her dad is here, so I cup her face and give her one last kiss. She opens for me, tasting us on my tongue and whimpering for more. I have to force myself to pull away and take a step back.

“Letting go of you is the hardest thing I’ve ever done, and I want you to know I’m never doing it again. This is temporary,” I say again, and it’s a reminder for both of us, “and it’s only because your life is in danger. We’re going to get rid of the threat, and then I’m bringing you back here and telling your dad the truth.”

She smiles and nods her head. “Okay. Hurry up so you can come get me.”

I smile back at her and give her a wink. “I’ll do my best, *principessa*, and you better text me so I know you’re okay.”

“I will,” she promises.

With one last look at her, I grab her bag and force myself to leave the room. She follows right behind me, and when we get to the bottom of the stairs and we hear her dad and uncles in the main room, she reaches out and runs her fingers over mine. I squeeze her hand, and she quickly pulls away right before we walk into the sitting room off the main entryway where her family is waiting.

Lev walks over to give her a hug. He’s here with Vitaly and Roman, who smile at her and say a few things in Russian. Everything seems fine until I glance over and see the look on Vitaly’s face. He’s eyeing his niece with a raised brow, and then turning his gaze to meet mine. His mouth hardens into a firm line, but he doesn’t say anything. His look says enough. Whatever the hell he saw, he doesn’t like it.

I keep my face an unreadable mask and turn back to the others. “So what’s the plan?”

Lev keeps his arm around his daughter’s shoulders and says, “All the kids and our wives are going to the farmhouse, and they’ll be guarded by a small army. We’re going to draw the Zolotov Bratva out, and then we’re going to show them what happens when you threaten a member of our family.”

“Lev said you wanted in on this. Are you sure about that,” Roman asks. “You’ll be making enemies you don’t need to make.”

“I want in on it,” I tell him. “They made an enemy of me the second they attacked Natalya in my territory.”

I chance a quick look at her, and even though my life has taught me how to keep my emotions off my face, I can’t bring myself to give her the dead stare I’d give anyone else. For just a moment, everything softens for her, and I let her see what I’m really feeling. It’s so brief that no one else catches

it, but her mouth turns up in a small smile before I look away, making the risk worth it.

“Fine,” Lev says. “Having your men working on this and knowing the Zolotovs can’t hide in your territory will make this a hell of a lot easier.” His blue eyes meet mine. “I want these fuckers gone, and I don’t care what it takes to make it happen.”

“Agreed,” I tell him, feeling the exact same way.

“All right, we need to get going.” Lev reaches down and grabs the bag I’d just been holding, slinging it over his shoulder and holding a hand out to me. “Thanks for keeping my daughter safe. I won’t forget it.”

I shake his hand, feeling like a jackass, because if he knew I’d just taken his precious daughter’s virginity, I doubt he’d still be thanking me. Now isn’t the time for truth, though, so all I say is, “You don’t need to thank me. I was happy to do it.”

“Thanks for everything, Dominic.”

I look down at Natalya and nod at her while fighting a grin. “Of course, Natalya. You’re welcome back anytime.”

She smiles and I wonder if she’s already feeling me slide out of her pussy. I hope she is. I hope her inner thighs grow sticky with each step she takes as she walks away from me. I want her to think of me nonstop while we’re apart, just like I’ll be thinking about her.

They start to leave, but Vitaly hangs back. When I give him a questioning look, he says, “I’ll stay here and discuss some of the plans with you. You don’t mind, do you?”

I hear the challenge in his voice, and I know he wants to talk to me about more than just the Zolotov Bratva. I give him a nod and walk the others to the door. Natalya chances a quick look back at me before getting into her dad’s car. I clutch her panties in my pocket, fisting the soft fabric and reminding myself that I will be getting her back. Her home is with me now, and nothing is going to change that.

When I walk back into the room, Vitaly’s leaning back in one of the leather armchairs, long legs stretched in front of him, and he’s holding a glass of vodka that he’s helped himself to. I walk over and pour myself a whiskey and take the chair opposite him.

“I’ve never seen you dressed so casually,” he comments, motioning a hand toward my jeans and T-shirt.

I shrug and take a drink. “It happens on occasion.”

After a few minutes of silence that I refuse to break, he asks, “Mind telling me why my niece wasn’t wearing any goddamn underwear?”

I study him, making sure to not reveal a damn thing with my face and calmly ask, “And you would know this how?”

This time it’s his turn to shrug. “I just can. When I was younger, I thought of it as a gift, but now that it pertains to my niece, I think it’s more of a curse.”

“Maybe she ran out of fresh clothes.”

“Maybe,” he admits. He takes another drink and studies me. “I saw the way she looked at you, Dominic.” He sighs and leans forward, resting his forearms on his thighs, drink still in hand as he meets my eyes. “Did you fuck my niece?”

“Jesus, Vitaly, what the hell?”

He lifts the hand that’s holding his vodka and points it at me. “I swear to god, Dominic, I don’t care what kind of truce or friendship our families have, if you took advantage of my niece, I’ll fucking kill you myself.”

I meet his eyes and let him hear how pissed I’m getting when I say, “I didn’t take advantage of Natalya.”

He lifts a brow. “You’re not denying you fucked her, though.” He groans and downs the rest of his vodka. “Fucking hell, man. What do you expect me to do with this information?”

Too angry to sit still, he gets up and refills his glass before pacing the room. He scrubs a hand through his hair and takes another drink, nearly emptying the glass in one go.

“My loyalty is to my brother, and I can’t fucking keep this from him.”

Before I can say anything, he holds up a hand and adds, “But I’m not saying shit until we get rid of the Zolotov threat. I can’t have Lev trying to kill you when all his focus needs to be on this.”

He paces for a few more minutes before stopping in front of me. “I can’t believe you let this happen. You could fuck anyone, Dominic. I know Natalya has a crush on you, that much was obvious with the way she was looking at you when you came to supper at the farmhouse, but for fuck’s sake, couldn’t you have just told her no? Did you have to take her goddamn virginity?”

He’s starting to really piss me off. I finish my whiskey and stand up, not bothering to hide the anger I’m feeling.

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“So tell me I’m wrong,” he practically begs, hoping like hell that maybe, just maybe, he’s misread the entire situation. I’m not going to lie to him, though, and he sees the truth on my face and shakes his head in defeat.

“I love her,” I tell him.

“Goddamn it.” He scrubs a hand over his jaw. “Of course you fucking do,” he groans. He meets my eyes, clearly not pleased with this turn of events but also resigned to the fact that he’ll never be able to change my mind about how I feel. He knows me better than that. “Lev is not going to be happy when he learns about this. He already shot you once and that was before he knew you’d slept with his daughter.”

“I remember,” I say, rolling the shoulder that still aches from time to time.

“Well that’s nothing compared to what he’s going to want to do to you now,” he warns.

“I know he’s going to be pissed, and I’m planning on telling him after the threat is gone. Natalya’s safety comes first. I won’t do anything that puts her life at risk.”

“We can agree on that at least.”

“I want to be the one to tell him.”

Vitaly lets out a harsh laugh. “Thank fuck, because I really don’t want to do it. I’ve seen him break a man’s jaw with a single punch on more than one occasion. No fucking thanks.” He scrubs a hand over his jawline. “Katya would be so sad if the next time I smile at her, I’m missing half my teeth. It’s hard to look sexy when you’re all gums.”

The corner of my mouth twitches, but I’m too depressed about having to let Natalya go to muster up a full smile. He smacks my back and shakes his head.

“This is not going to be easy for Lev to accept,” he warns. “You have several things going against you,” he says and then proceeds to make a list in case I was confused about all the ways I’m going to come up short. “You’re old enough to be her goddamn dad, you’re a friend that he trusted to keep his daughter safe, and you’re Italian.” He shakes his head when he says that last one.

“What’s wrong with being Italian?”

He frowns and says, “It’s not Russian.”

“She’s half American,” I remind him like Natalya had reminded me.

Vitaly laughs. “Yeah, you keep telling yourself that.”

“Our kids are going to be unbelievably stubborn and headstrong.”

The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them, and I’m not sure who’s more stunned, me or Vitaly. His brown eyes widen in surprise before he lets out a disbelieving laugh. “Wow. I wish I could stay and laugh at you, but it’s my niece you’re talking about and this shit is getting weird. I remember you holding her at Matvey’s wedding.” He shakes his head. “That’s fucked up, man.”

“It’s not like I planned this, and I sure as hell wasn’t thinking that I was going to marry her one day when I held her at the wedding.”

He sets his glass down while I take the last swallow of mine.

“I kind of hate you for making me keep this goddamn secret. It’s a curse to be this damn observant about sexual vibes.”

“It’s a heavy burden indeed.”

“Don’t fucking crack jokes. I’m being serious. How the fuck am I supposed to look at my brothers now?” He sighs again, making sure I know how pissed he is about this. “Katya will know what to do.”

“You’re telling your wife?”

He turns back to me. “I tell my wife everything.”

“Everything?” I ask because for the first time I’m curious about how marriages work within the Bratva.

“Pretty much. I mean, I may leave out some gruesome details, but Katya grew up in a Bratva. She knows what I do, and besides,” he says with a soft laugh, “she’d just get the information out of me some other way. The woman can be very persuasive when she wants to be.”

He smiles at some memory of Katya extracting information from him and gives another soft laugh. Envy hits me hard. I’ve never been jealous before, especially not of married men with families. I used to look at them with pity, not envy, but hearing Vitaly talk about his wife makes me wish I had that with Natalya. I want the memories, the intimacy of a shared life, and the freedom to talk about her instead of feeling like we need to hide what we have.

“I’m talking to Lev as soon as this is over,” I tell Vitaly. “I love Natalya, and her place is here with me. He’s going to have to accept it.”

Vitaly just laughs and smacks my shoulder. “It’s been nice knowing you, Dominic.” He’s still laughing when he walks out of the room, leaving me alone with a head full of Natalya and an ache in my chest from missing her.

I pour myself another drink and make my way back upstairs to my room. I feel the loss of her even more when I step into the bedroom. She permeates every inch of this place now, and it feels so goddamn empty without her. Refusing to even look at the bed, I walk past and take a quick shower. When I'm done, I shave for the first time in a week and grab one of my suits. Her pink dress and sandals are right where I left them earlier, and the sight of them makes me feel slightly better. It's a reminder that I'll be getting her back.

Before I leave the room again, I text her a quick message.

I miss you like crazy, principessa. Your Uncle Vitaly knows about us, but he's not going to say anything. Your dad's focus needs to be on ending this threat. He doesn't need to be worrying about anything else right now, but once this is over, I'm telling him how I feel about you and I'm bringing you back here where you belong.

After I've sent it, I text my cousins and tell them to meet me downstairs. They each have their own rooms here, but they're rarely at the house. The next text I send is to Vitaly because the fucker spent the whole time giving me hell about Natalya and forgot to actually tell me what their plan is for taking down the Zolotovs.

The first person to text me back is the one I want to hear from most. Her message effortlessly pulls a smile from me and releases the tension in my chest.

I miss you too, Dominic. I'm glad you're telling him. I hate lying to my family, and I know they'll eventually learn to accept our relationship. They have to, right? Anyway, I'm going to pack some bags. We're all being brought out to the farmhouse, but they're doing it in some sneaky, covert way that's going to require several cars and take forever. I also need to take a quick shower because someone left me a sticky mess. I can't believe you made me drive home like that.

I laugh while I type out a response.

I like you sticky, principessa, and you didn't drive home. You drove away from it. Be careful and text me often. I love you. And, yes, sweetheart, they'll learn to accept us because I'm not going to give them a choice. I refuse to let you go.

I'm walking down the stairs to meet my cousins when her reply comes in.

I love you too. I'll text when I get there. Be careful, Dominic. Don't you dare get yourself hurt because of me.

It would be worth it, principessa.

After I send the last message, I pocket my phone and follow the loud Italian coming from the kitchen. When I walk in, I see Dario and Sandro sitting at the island and a smiling Lucia dishing them out huge plates of food. She turns her smile on me and I feel a stab of guilt about sneaking off to Mama Sofia's last night.

She hands me a plate of pasta and pats my cheek. "Don't worry. She'll be back." Then she gives me a knowing wink and walks off to get the freshly baked bread out of the oven. Apparently I'm shit at hiding how I feel about Natalya. The woman has ruined my poker face.

Sandro laughs and pulls off a hunk of bread before dipping it in the shallow bowl of olive oil that Lucia's set out for us. "Just think how happy our dad's going to be when he hears about this."

"She's not Italian," I remind him.

Sandro just smiles. "He won't care. He just wants you to have sons." Then he lets out another laugh and elbows his brother. "He'll be thrilled when he finds out she's eighteen. He'll be expecting no less than ten sons, maybe even more."

"Jesus," I groan. I've just recently warmed up to the idea of having kids, but that doesn't mean I want my family planning out her pregnancies.

"Thanks, cousin," Dario says. "You just took the pressure off of us."

"Yeah, he did." Sandro laughs while Lucia shakes her head at us.

"You boys should all be having big families. This house should be filled with children." She gives me a pointed look. "I'm not getting any younger."

I smile and kiss the top of her head. "I'll do my best, Lucia."

"Oh, I'm sure you will," she mutters, making us all laugh. With one last look around, she makes sure we have everything we could possibly need and then fixes a plate for Dr. Bianchi, adding a plate for herself at the last minute. When I lift a brow at her, she says, "I'm giving you privacy so you can talk business."

"That's very kind of you," I tell her, and I give her just enough of a smile to let her know I'm on to her game.

"I thought so," she says with a grin, feigning innocence and adding extra bread to the tray before picking it up and walking out the door.

Once she's gone, I pull up the texts from Vitaly that have come in and read them while we eat.

"So what's the plan?" Dario finally asks, running out of patience.

"Vitaly's sent me a list of places in our territory where the Zolotov Bratva has been spotted. Looks like we'll be paying a few visits tonight and trying to flush them out. I want everyone on this. I want this finished and done with."

Sandro smiles and raises his glass. "And then you can get your girl back and start working on those babies."

I don't bother telling him that there's a good chance one is already on the way. If not now, then soon, because filling Natalya with my cum is my new favorite thing, and I can't see myself giving that up anytime soon. Already desperate to be back inside her, I put all my focus on getting everything ready for tonight. I don't want to be separated from her any longer than I have to be.

Chapter 14

Natalya

“Tell me everything, and I mean every damn detail.”

I look over at Svetlana’s grinning face and laugh while I collapse onto the bed. Walking away from Dominic was the hardest thing I’ve ever done, and then I had to lie to my family and act like it didn’t bother me to leave him, which I really hate doing. I’d packed my bags and then we’d spent hours driving around and making sure there was no way in hell we were being followed before heading out to the farmhouse. I’m exhausted and all I want to do is sleep, but my best friend is making it very clear that I won’t be getting any rest until I’ve told her everything.

“Your dad knows,” I tell her, figuring I might as well start with a bang, just not the one she’s expecting to hear about.

Her mouth drops open. “What? How?”

I groan and feel my face heat up. After Dominic told me what had happened, I briefly saw my Uncle Vitaly, but it was long enough for him to give me a look that clearly said *you and I are going to be having a talk very soon*.

“He was with my dad and Uncle Roman when they came to pick me up. Evidently, your dad noticed something about the way we were looking at each other.”

“I knew he had it bad for you.” Svetlana plops down on the bed next to me. “It’s kind of sweet that he can’t hide how he feels. The man is impossible to read, but when it comes to you, he can’t keep his feelings contained.”

“It is kind of sweet,” I admit, smiling and letting out a soft laugh when she gently elbows my arm.

“He’s massively hung, right?” she asks, not even slightly embarrassed. “I mean, you can just kind of tell he would be. He’s way too confident and sexy to be slinging around something the size of my index finger.”

I snort out a laugh and turn even redder. “No, he’s definitely bigger than that.” I have no desire to share too many details, but I can’t let her continue to walk around thinking my man isn’t hung well.

“Did it hurt?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe,” I tell her.

She laughs and turns to look at me. “It was worth it though, right?”

I meet her brown eyes and smile. “Like you wouldn’t believe.”

She laughs and sighs and then elbows me again. “I’m so fucking jealous.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll meet the right guy. I know you will, and thanks to yours truly, it’ll be easier for you. They’re all going to have a fit when they find out about me and Dominic, so anything you do is going to seem like no big deal.”

“Oh my god, that’s so true. You’re bonking a man who’s old enough to be your dad, a man that they all trust and know, so I can go hog wild and it’ll still seem tame in comparison.”

“You’re welcome.”

“You’re such a good friend.”

I laugh and elbow her back. “And you better not ever forget it.”

“Never,” she promises. After a few seconds, she asks, “You’re not going to tell me any spicy details, are you?”

I think about everything Dominic and I shared and tell her the truth. “It feels wrong to share something so intimate, but I will tell you that he looks amazing naked, he’s incredibly skilled with every part of his body, and I love him more than I ever thought possible and miss him so much it hurts.”

She squeezes my hand and whispers, “I knew he had to be hung like a horse.”

“I really love that that’s what you took from everything I just said.”

“Did you say more?” She tries to look completely innocent when she asks, but I can tell she’s holding back a laugh. “I swear I only remember the dick talk.”

“You’re terrible.”

“I’m not the one bonking a forty-three-year old.”

“Oh my god, you have to stop saying bonking.”

She laughs and then says, “Seriously, I’m really happy for you, and I hope like hell that one day I’ll meet a gorgeous man who’s hung as well as Dominic.”

“You will,” I tell her. “I have complete faith that somewhere out there is a man with a giant dick who’s going to come along and sweep you right off your feet.”

She sighs. “A girl can dream.”

We talk for a few more minutes, and she fills me in on everything I missed while I was at Dominic’s until my mom hollers up at us that supper is ready. Until this threat is taken care of, my cousins and I are here with our moms. Everyone is here except for Luka, Max, and Val. They’re becoming more and more involved with the Bratva and loving every damn second of it. Sasha is more than ready to join them, and when Svetlana and I walk into the kitchen, he’s wearing the same grumpy look on his face that he’s had since the others left him behind. I walk over and squeeze his shoulder, leaning in so only he can hear me.

“Cheer up, Sasha, you’ll be off killing bad guys in no time.”

“Not soon enough,” he mutters. “I heard you helped Dominic by translating. That’s more than I’ve ever been allowed to do and that hurts me on a deep level, sis.”

I smile and give him another side hug. “If it makes you feel any better, I had to keep my back to the guy and I was only allowed to whisper.”

“It does, thanks. That’s really sad.”

“I didn’t want to see anything,” I admit. “I think one of Dominic’s cousins broke a few teeth. No way do I want to see that shit.”

“That’s the fun part, Nat,” my brother says, and I can hear the truth in his words. Sasha doesn’t do the whole fake bravado thing. I think he just genuinely loves violence, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t worry about him from time to time.

“I think you might be a little insane.”

He side-eyes me, a grin playing at his lips. “I think you might be right.”

I laugh at my crazy brother and shake my head. He might be a bit of a psycho, but I also know he’d never hurt anyone who didn’t first come after him or someone in our family. He’d never cross the line and go after someone innocent. There’s a dark side to Sasha, but there’s also a gentle one. I can see it in the smile he’s giving me and in the way he keeps looking around to make sure our younger sister and mom are okay. We’re

surrounded by more bodyguards than usual, but he's still going to be on high alert until our dad gets back.

"Hope everyone is hungry," our Aunt Emily says, setting down a huge casserole dish of scalloped potatoes while our Aunt Simona brings in a plate of hotdogs and hamburgers. She and my mom have been on the back deck grilling, and the food looks and smells delicious. Aunt Alina drops off a big bowl of salad and puts out another dish that's filled with homemade macaroni and cheese because low carb doesn't mean shit to this family.

She gives me a quick wink before grabbing a bunch of drinks from the fridge, and then we all crowd around and start filling plates. There's enough food for the men on duty to eat too, and they time it so they're eating a quick meal one at a time so it doesn't interfere with our safety, although I really doubt anyone is going to attack us here.

It feels strange to not have Grigori around. He's been a constant in my life, and now instead of his familiar face, there's a new man that I've never seen before. He's a lot younger than Grigori, probably late twenties, and where his predecessor was quick to give me a smile, this guy is not. Vitya's all business and has made it abundantly clear that he isn't here to make friends. I think Dominic would approve. I texted him earlier and told him my new bodyguard was part robot and his reply had been *Good, and he better keep his goddamn eyes off you. When you move in with me, one of my own men will be assigned to you, so you won't have to worry about Mr. Robot for long.* Dominic has a possessive side, and I find it incredibly cute.

"What are you smiling about?" Svetlana asks, sitting down next to me once she's loaded her plate to almost overflowing. "Oh wait, I think I already know." She wiggles her eyebrows in a way that makes me laugh while she grabs one of her hotdogs and makes it bounce right in front of my face.

"Oh my god, you're terrible," I laugh while swatting her weiner away.

"I'm not wrong, though, am I?"

When I don't say anything, she just laughs and reassembles her meal. Yelena sits down on my other side, smiling because I know she saw what Svetlana did. Even with her smile, I can see the worry she's trying to hide.

I lean closer and whisper, "He'll be fine," and then give her a smile. We've never really openly talked about whatever is going on between her and Val, but I want her to know that I'm okay with whatever it is. She

returns my smile but doesn't say anything. She'll tell me when she's ready, and I'm sure as hell not going to push her into it.

While everyone else is busy talking and eating, she whispers, "I'm glad things turned out well with Dominic."

I hadn't spilled everything to her like I did Svetlana, but she clearly knows something is up. "Thanks," I whisper back and then pick up my hamburger because I'm starving and more than ready for bed. Dominic exhausted my body, and I feel like it's going to take days to recover, not that I'm complaining. I'll happily be sore because of him.

What I thought would turn into a night or two of forced separation ends up lasting way longer than any of us anticipated. By the eighth night, we're all irritable and more than ready to get the hell out of here. Dominic texts me often, but it's not the same, and I miss him like crazy. Unable to sleep, I go downstairs to make some tea, surprised to find my mom already there.

"Hey, honey. Can't sleep?" she asks, and then gets another mug and teabag for me.

"No." I sit on one of the barstools and watch her fill the kettle and put it on the stove. "How about you?"

She sighs and shakes her head. "This is the first time your dad and I have ever had to be apart." Her soft laugh is filled with the pain she's trying to hide. "I can't seem to fall asleep without him."

"Why do they have to keep staying away? Don't you think they're being too overprotective about this? Can't they just watch over us in the city if we promise not to leave the apartment?"

"You know your dad and uncles would never take the risk. They're close to finding the men they want. Your dad told me tonight that it should be over soon."

"I hope so."

She leans against the counter and studies me for a few seconds. "Why are you in such a rush to get back? You guys usually love it out here."

I shrug and lean back, fidgeting with the string on the teabag. "I just hate worrying about everyone, and I hate that everyone has to be separated."

Without a word she grabs the kettle off the stove right before it has the chance to give off an obnoxious whistle and fills both our mugs. After they're both filled and steeping, she leans against the counter again, watching me.

“I’m glad things went so well at Dominic’s.”

My heart is racing, but I try like hell to keep my face calm while I blow on the steaming mug of tea in front of me. “Yeah, I know how lucky I got that night. I’m really glad his house was so close.”

“Mmm,” she says, and I feel like there’s a lot more behind that sound than she’s letting on. I know I’m right when she adds, “Good thing you had his number in your phone.”

I nearly choke on the sip of tea I’ve just taken. My mind freezes, and for the life of me I can’t come up with a reasonable explanation for why his number would be in my phone, and I’m not sure I want to. I refuse to sit here and lie to my mom. I love her too much for that, so I don’t say anything. She sighs and reaches across the counter to squeeze my hand.

“I love you so much, Natalya.”

It’s the last thing I’m expecting her to say. I raise my eyes to meet hers, scared I’m going to see anger or disappointment, but she’s just looking at me like she always does, a look full of unconditional love.

“Did you know that the whole time I was pregnant with you your dad was sneaking off and buying little girl baby clothes?”

“What?”

My mom smiles at the memory. “Every time I’d go into our closet, I’d find new bags hidden away. Pink sleepers, cute little bibs with *Daddy’s Girl* written on them, pink blankets, if it was pink and girly, he was buying it and hiding it away.”

“I never knew that. I thought for sure he would’ve been secretly hoping for a boy.”

“Nope, he wanted a little girl. He loves Sasha like crazy, don’t get me wrong, but he really, really wanted a little girl first.”

My eyes start to fill at the thought of my dad secretly buying me baby clothes before he even knew I was on the way. It makes me feel guiltier than I already do.

My mom squeezes my hand again. “I didn’t tell you that to make you cry,” she says, giving a soft laugh. “I just thought maybe you could use the reminder that your dad loves you more than life itself and that there’s nothing you could ever do to change that.”

“I don’t know about that,” I say, thinking about how I’d willingly dropped to my knees for his friend.

“I’m not asking for details. You know I can’t keep secrets from your dad, so I’d rather not know anything right now, not while he’s so worried about this threat, but I do know that your dad would never do anything that would risk him losing you from his life.”

I clutch my mom’s hand and squeeze it tighter. “That would never happen. I couldn’t survive without my family.” I say the words, knowing they’re true, and knowing that Dominic would never ask me to. He wouldn’t ever ask me to choose between him and my family. I simply refuse to do it. I choose them both, and I’ve made up my mind that I’m never letting either one of them go. They’re just all going to have to learn to deal with it, because I’m keeping all of them in my life.

“He feels the same way,” my mom reminds me. “Your dad might show a tough exterior, but you and I both know what a big softie he is.”

“He really is,” I say, making her smile and give a soft laugh. Her eyes grow sad again, and I know she’s missing him like crazy. “I know this will be over soon, Mom. You’ll be back home with him in no time.”

She nods and gives me another smile before taking a drink of her tea. “I guess I’ll try to get some sleep. You should too, okay?”

“Okay.”

She walks around and pulls me in for a hug. Kissing the top of my head, she whispers, “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Mom.”

She gives me one more hug before walking back to the room she’s been staying in at the end of the hall. The house is quiet, but I know the guards are still wide awake and patrolling around outside, making sure no one approaches the house from any direction. I’m ready for this nightmare to be over, and after what my mom just told me, I’m starting to feel brave enough to think this might actually all work out okay.

I’m still smiling when I walk in the opposite direction to the room I’m sharing with Svetlana and Yelena. I’m almost to the stairs when a hand reaches out and clamps down over my mouth, stopping the scream before I have a chance to voice it. His other hand holds a gun to my head, the cold metal pressing against my temple and making me feel like I might faint. I’ve been around guns my whole life, but I’ve never had one pressed against my head. The sensation is downright terrifying.

“Don’t fucking try it.”

The words are in Russian, a harsh whisper in my ear when I move my leg to kick him like my dad taught me. I'm about to go for it anyway, but his next sentence stops me cold.

"Your sister is sleeping right in there." He points to the closed door in front of us. "Want to know how I know that?"

He's not expecting an answer, so he keeps his hand clamped down on my mouth.

"I was just in there watching her sleep. She really hates covers, doesn't she?"

He gives a soft laugh, and I want to vomit. Mia always kicks her covers off. Every morning it's like she's had a violent struggle with her bed and won. We've always teased her about it, but there's no way in hell this fucker would know that unless he really was in there watching her. I don't recognize his voice, so I know he's not one of the men who regularly watches over us. He must be one of the guys who were brought in for extra security.

"You're going to walk out of here with me and not make a fucking sound. If you try to get away or scream, I swear to you that I will start killing your family. You and I both know there are enough men here to stop me, but trust me when I say I'll be able to kill a few people you love before they do. Are you willing to risk your sister for that? Your brother?" He pauses and gives another soft laugh. "Your mom? I really doubt you want that after that sweet heart-to-heart you just had."

He feels me tense and tightens his grip on me. There's no way in hell I'm going to do anything that puts my family in danger. It'll kill my dad if something happens to me, but it'll completely destroy him if he loses all of us in one night. I soften my body, letting him know I won't fight him.

"That's what I thought. We're going to walk out of here, and you're going to be the perfect little docile princess I know you can be. If you fight me, I promise I'll spend whatever is left of my life making sure you regret it."

I believe him, so I nod my head as much as he'll allow, letting him know that I won't try anything. He keeps his hand on my mouth, the gun pressed to my head, and my back tight against his chest as he starts to lead us down the hall. My eyes dart around, and as much as I want free of this bastard, all I can do is hope like hell no one wakes up to find us. Niki, Damien, Evgeny, and Sasha are most likely in the media room that we're

about to walk past, and I know if one of them wakes up, I'll be dying, because I won't be able to just stand back and watch them get shot.

My body shakes as we walk past the door, and it isn't until we're completely past it that I let out the shaky breath I've been holding. I'm still trying to convince myself that everything is going to be okay, but when we turn the corner by the back door and I see the man lying in a pool of blood, my knees buckle, and a muffled scream slips out before I can stop it. I recognize the brown hair and the black dragon that's tattooed on his neck. Vitya's tattoo is one of the first things I noticed about him, but now it's covered in blood, and my heart breaks for the man who just gave his life for mine, a man who I barely got to know and who will never grow old because of me.

Tears fall down my cheeks, hitting the bastard's hand, but he doesn't give a shit about the fact that I'm crying or upset or scared to death. He just presses his gun harder against my temple until I'm sure that if I live to see tomorrow, I'm going to have a nice circular bruise to show for it.

He keeps me pressed against him and whispers, "Open the door and don't make a fucking sound"

My hands are shaking when I grip the doorknob, but I manage to open it without making any noise. He scans the area and moves his gun just enough to check his watch. He must have this timed to perfection because after a few more shaky breaths from me, he hustles me out the door like we're on a tight schedule. My bare feet hit the grass as he drags me quickly across the yard. I'm in nothing but a pair of sleep shorts and a tank top, and all I can think about is my cell phone. I'd left it on the nightstand before coming down to get some tea, wrongfully assuming I wouldn't need it. They could've tracked me by my phone, but now there's no way for anyone in my family to know where I'm being taken. My heart thunders in my chest. I think about Dominic, knowing how pissed he's going to be when he finds out I'm gone. He and my family will search for me, but that doesn't mean I'm going to be found, at least not in time anyway.

The man who's holding me drags me into the woods, and I'm too scared of dying to worry about the possibility of getting hookworms in my bare feet. I try to keep up with his long strides, but when I trip and start to fall, he lets out an annoyed grunt and stops walking. A spark of hope flutters in my chest that maybe I'll be able to get a scream out or hit him hard enough for me to run into the woods, but that hope dies a quick death when he

lowers his gun and quickly pulls something from his back pocket. I start to wriggle, trying to break free, but he kicks the back of my knee, forcing my legs to buckle and my body to slump to the ground. In seconds, a strip of fabric is forced between my lips. He ties it off behind my head, tight enough to hurt. Remembering everything my dad taught me, I twist to the side and put everything I have into the punch I swing at him. He turns at the last second, saving himself from a broken nose, but I still manage to hit his cheek hard enough to pull a grunt from him and stun him long enough for me to get to my feet.

“Fucking bitch,” he growls behind me, but I don’t stop.

I let out a muffled scream and run in the direction we just came from. If I can get to the yard, then someone will see me. I just need to get out of these damn woods. I see the clearing ahead, and I push myself harder. I’m only a few steps away when the man hooks an arm around my waist and throws me to the ground hard enough to knock the air from my lungs. I’m still trying to catch my breath when he towers over me, bringing his face close to mine. I recognize him now, and I have just enough time to remember his name is Andrik before he pulls back his fist and punches me so hard it feels like a sledgehammer to my goddamn head. Darkness creeps into the edges of my vision as nausea threatens to rid me of my supper. I struggle to not pass out and then let out a groan when I feel him tie my hands together before slinging me over his shoulder so he can carry me the rest of the way.

My vision fades in and out, and my cheek hurts so bad that I’m convinced he’s broken something. This is the same path Dominic carried me down, and the thought of him and how sweetly he’d held me has me crying even harder. I may never see him again. I may never see my family again. Everyone said that this was about someone trying to kill me to hurt my dad. The end goal was always my death, and now that they have me, it doesn’t take a genius to figure out what they have planned.

“Shut the fuck up,” Andrik mutters, walking faster and not caring at all that every step he takes causes a jolt of pain to run through my body. He’d tied my gag and my wrists way too damn tightly, and with my arms behind my back, I’m helpless and completely at his mercy.

I try to calm myself down, if for no other reason than I’m afraid I’m going to hyperventilate from being forced to breathe only through my nose while I’m crying. I think about my family and Dominic and how badly they

want me to survive this, and I force myself to take long, slow breaths. I don't want to die at eighteen. There are so many things I want to experience and do, and I sure as hell don't want my death to be something that's going to scar and haunt every single person I love.

When I'm convinced I'm going to have bruises across the entire length of my stomach, Andrik finally steps out of the woods. I crane my neck to the side, trying to see where I'm being led, and when I spot the car waiting for us, a heavy wave of fear hits me. Being put in a vehicle and driven off to an unknown location takes all this to a whole new level. My body starts shaking, uncontrollable tremors that I know Andrik can feel because he lets out another laugh before opening the back door and roughly throwing me onto the seat. There's another man driving, but I don't recognize him when he looks back at me. The cold, dead eyes tell me all I need to know. He won't be suddenly growing a conscience on my account. No, this guy looks like he'd happily put a bullet in my head and then go about his day without a twinge of remorse.

Andrik gets in the passenger seat and starts speaking in Russian as the other man starts to drive us to what will most likely be my final resting place.

"Watch her. She's a fucking handful and knows how to throw a punch."

The driver laughs. "Yeah, I'll be sure and watch out for the tiny girl who's tied and gagged."

Andrik runs his fingers over the cheek I'd punched. "That's why she's tied up. Her dad must've taught her a few things."

"Well poor Lev will have to spend the rest of his life knowing he didn't teach her enough," the driver says before letting out another harsh laugh.

No matter what happens to me, I really hope my dad finds these fuckers and kills them very slowly. I wiggle my way up to sitting and look out the window, trying to figure out where they're taking me, but it's useless. It's the middle of the night, and we're a long way from anyone or anything. That's why my family chose this place. The seclusion was once part of the appeal. If my ass makes it out of this alive, I'm going to grab onto Dominic and never fucking let him go. As much as everyone was trying to protect me, I know this wouldn't have happened if I'd kept my ass glued to his. As quickly as the thought hits me, I realize that if I hadn't been there tonight, then Andrik would've taken Mia or Sasha, and that's not something I can

live with. As horrible as this is, I'd rather have my ass bound and gagged in this fucker's backseat instead of my little sister or brother.

We drive for what feels like forever, and no matter how hard I try to catch a glimpse of something familiar, there's nothing, just blackness and a wall of trees on either side of the road. No one is going to be able to find me. Resting my forehead against the glass, I savor the last few precious moments of my life. I'm not about to go willingly to my death, but I know what my odds are here, and it's not looking good. Even though I've only been alive eighteen years, my mind is full of a lifetime of memories. I'm so damn lucky. I've been surrounded by so much love since the moment I took my first breath. I close my eyes and picture my family's smiling faces, hear their laughter and can almost feel their arms wrapped around me in a hug, because even though I'm alone, they're still with me. They'll always be with me because that's what a good family does. Their love surrounds me even when we're not together. It's a bond that can't be broken, and I cling to it right now.

Dominic is never far from my mind, but when I start to think about him, my heart feels like it's going to break apart and shatter into a million pieces. I want a lifetime with him, and instead I was given just a few days. They were perfect days, days I hadn't even thought possible, but they were still just days, a handful of hours, and not nearly enough of them. His sister's death cut him so deeply, and I have a horrible feeling that mine might destroy him completely, and that's the last thing I want for him. The thought of his pain makes me feel like I can't breathe.

"Don't start this shit again," Andrik growls when he hears me snifle.

I tell him to fuck off, but with the gag it's only a pathetic muffle that doesn't faze him in the slightest. I go back to staring out my window, each minute feeling like an hour until we turn off onto a long, gravel road. The sky is only starting to lighten, and it's still mainly dark, but there's a hint of the dawn that's coming. It's a time of day I don't often get to see, and I make a promise to myself that if I make it out of this, I'm going to try my best to be an early bird because something this beautiful shouldn't be missed.

We stop in front of a brick, one-story house that looks deceptively normal. There's even a flowerbed out front filled with blooming marigolds, and when the headlights hit them, I see the vibrant shades of orange and yellow. When I look out the other windows, all I can see is land and the

dark woods that surround us. There aren't any signs of neighbors or a hint at where we might be. There's nothing, and if I do manage to escape, I'll be running barefoot in the dark in a remote area that's miles away from anyone. I don't even know what direction to run in. If you get far enough upstate, it's just wilderness. I don't want to die from dehydration or from getting mauled by a bear, but I'll take the chance if I'm given one because I'm guessing that death would be preferable to whatever hell these bastards have planned.

Andrik opens my door and roughly pulls me out. Not even bothering to give me a chance to walk, he throws me over his shoulder again and heads for the front door.

"They'll be here soon," the driver says, shoving his phone back into his pocket as Andrik opens the door and walks me into a very normal-looking living room. I'm relieved to see it hasn't been set up as a torture chamber, but the sight of a couch and armchair isn't enough to put me at ease. They can kill me just as easily on the floral fabric as they can a grimy, concrete floor.

I let out a muffled grunt when he tosses me onto the couch. My arms are numb, my mouth aches, and I'm trying very hard to not vomit so I don't asphyxiate on last night's hamburger. While I take slow, steady breaths through my nose, he looks down at me like he wants nothing more than for me to act up so he can hit me again. I notice the bruise forming on his cheek, and it makes me feel a little better, but I'm too scared to gloat about it.

"Your dad is going to regret humiliating Alexei."

I don't bother trying to mumble out anything. I save my strength and lean my head back, resting it on the cushion behind me. These may be my last few relatively pain-free moments, and I don't intend to waste them. I scan as much of the house as I can see while Andrik and the other man, who I learned on the drive is Gleb, sit down in the two armchairs across from me. They discuss some new strip club they went to last weekend. Evidently there's a dancer named Bunny who can do some pretty impressive shit on the pole. While they reminisce about upside down splits and tits that defy gravity, I try to wiggle my hands free of the rope that's been cutting off my circulation since he wrapped it too damn tightly around my wrists.

"Keep trying, princess," Andrik teases, noticing the slight movement in my shoulders. This time I do tell him to fuck off, not caring if he can't

understand it around my gag. He gets the sentiment, and that's good enough for me.

"Finally," Gleb says, getting up and walking to the front window when he sees headlights approaching. "They're here." He looks back at me and winks. "Fun's about to begin, sweetheart."

Gleb looks older than Andrik, but they're both fit, both wearing tactical gear, and both have the same cold, dead look when they bother to meet my eyes. I know with absolute certainty that either one would be more than happy to end my life.

I turn my head to look out the large window. The porch light is on, allowing me to see the two SUVs pull up next to Gleb's car. The doors of the first one open, and I watch as nine armed men get out and then quickly fan out to guard and surround the house. Two men get out of the second, and after several tense minutes, the front door opens, and as much as I hate my two kidnappers, I'd much rather spend the day with them than the angry Bratva boss who's just walked in. After helping Dominic interrogate the man they'd caught, I know the Zolotov Bratva is behind this, and I've been around enough Bratva bosses to be able to spot one. Adrian Zolotov might not be as young or as physically in shape as my dad and uncles, but he exudes the same kind of power they do, and the men around him seem to grow smaller when he steps into the room.

Behind him is a much younger man, but given the same dirty-blond hair and blue eyes, I'm guessing this must be his son—the pussy who lost a fight with my dad and now feels like he needs to kill me to even things out.

"Take off her gag," Adrian says, and Andrik immediately steps forward to remove the filthy fabric from my swollen, dry mouth.

"Bastard," I whisper just loud enough for him to hear before he steps back and tosses the rag aside.

Adrian walks over and sits down next to me like he's just here for a friendly chat. His grey hair is thinning, but I can tell he's desperately trying to hide it. His broad shoulders fill the space, and I imagine he probably had an impressive physique back in the day. What was once muscle has been allowed to turn soft, and it looks like Adrian might have a sweet tooth based on his puffy cheeks and distended belly.

He runs his eyes over me, and I'd give anything to have picked out jogging pants and a sweatshirt last night to sleep in instead of the shorts and thin shirt I'd chosen.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Natalya.” His voice has the raspy sound of someone who’s had a pack-a-day habit since I was in diapers. He looks to his men and laughs. “Hard to believe this scrawny thing is the infamous Lev Melnikov’s precious daughter.”

They share a man laugh while I ask, “What are you going to do to me?”

Adrian leans back and motions at his son. “Alexei is going to get some payback.”

I turn to his son, feeling an instant hatred for the fucker. He’s in much better shape than his dad, but I can see why mine kicked his ass so easily. Alexei is the kind of man who’s all show and very little substance. He’s a guy who looks like he’d be good in a fight, but he lacks the smarts to follow it through. He’d be too busy preening for the crowd when he should be studying his opponent and staying five steps ahead. I’m guessing Alexei is a very bad chess player.

“So you’re going to hurt me because my dad kicked your ass?”

The look on his face is almost worth the sharp smack he gives me. Almost. He hits me right where Andrik’s punch had landed, and the force of it has my teeth shredding my gums and my eyes filling with tears. He fists my hair and jerks my head back so he can get right in my face like the dickhead he is.

“I’m going to do more than hurt you, bitch, and your dad didn’t kick my ass. He tricked me and fought dirty.”

“Whatever you say, Alexei.” I’d muster up a laugh to go with it if I could, but the smartass comment is all I have the strength for. I look at the four men in front of me. “I feel like I should warn you that my family is going to be giving you all very slow, very painful deaths for this.”

“They’re never going to find us, princess,” Alexei growls, spitting out *princess* like it’s an insult, and coming from his lips it feels like one. He holds his phone up and gives me a smile that has a ball of fear settling low in my gut. “We’re going to make a film for Daddy.” He squats down in front of me, resting one hand on my thigh. I try to kick him away, but he digs his fingers in tight enough to make me hiss out a breath and bite my tongue before I can beg him to stop.

“The first film is going to be of me beating the hell out of you until you’re a beautiful, bloody mess.”

I try not to look as terrified as I feel, but he sees it. I know he does because he winks at me.

“The second film is going to be of me fucking his sweet little princess.”

As much as I try to fight it, my body starts to shake from a fear that’s quickly taking over every part of me.

“And the last video will be of me killing you.” He leans in closer and digs his fingers in harder, pressing in until a whimper escapes my lips. “I wonder which video will be the one to bring him to his knees.”

Everything grows cold inside me, and I’m shaking so damn hard my teeth are chattering. I’m trying so hard to be brave, but all I can think about is how badly this is going to hurt and how much this is going to kill my dad to watch. I don’t want my family to see this. I don’t want these images in their head, but it’s the thought of Dominic having to watch another man rape me that pulls a sob from my shaking body.

“Perfect,” Alexei says, smacking my thigh hard enough to sting. “Make sure to cry just like that when we start recording.”

“This is going to destroy your family,” Andrei says, voicing what I already know. “Your dad made the mistake of getting too close. He loves his family too goddamn much, and it’s going to be his ruin. While they’re mourning your death, we’re going to take over the city and make it ours.”

I look over at Andrik. “Is this why you betrayed my family? They offered you a better position once they take over?”

Andrik shrugs like it’s no big deal to turn against the Bratva you pledged your life to. “Better position and better pay.”

“I think you might regret that before you die,” I tell him, but he just shakes his head and laughs.

“Yeah, I really doubt that, princess.” He grabs the phone that Alexei offers him. “I’ll be the one filming, by the way. I’ll be sure and get lots of close-ups.”

Alexei pulls my attention back to him by running his hand up my side. I suck in a quick breath and begin to have serious doubts that I’m going to be able to mentally handle this.

“I’ve seen the way Lev guards you, princess, and I wish I could say I’ll go easy on you since it’s your first time,” he stops and gives another harsh laugh, “but I’m not going to. I’m going to fuck you like you’re a whore who’s used to twelve-inch dick every night of the week.”

Jesus Christ. My vision goes spotty, and I pray to whoever may be listening, begging them to make me pass out soon, because I don’t want to be awake for any of this. My only comfort is that he doesn’t know about

Dominic. Maybe that means he won't be sending him a video too, maybe by some miracle he'll never be forced to watch what's about to happen to me.

Alexei stands back up and Gleb walks over to grab me, moving me from the couch to prepare for the first video. It doesn't escape my notice that the *beating the shit out of me* video is coming before the raping one. That tells me everything I need to know about Alexei Zolotov. There's no reasoning with a man like him. He's a psychopath, but he's also a misogynistic asshole, and to be a woman on the receiving end of that combination means there's only one way this is going to end for me, and knowing I'm about to die by his hands breaks my goddamn heart.

Gleb sits me down on the kitchen floor. My knees dig into the hard, white tile that's about to be covered in my blood while Alexei takes off his shirt and shakes his hands out, preparing to beat the hell out of the bound, defenseless woman in front of him.

Andrik lifts the phone, positioning himself in the room so he's in the perfect spot to catch everything on video. He gives me a wink, and I can see the excitement in his eyes. What the fuck is wrong with these guys? I've been surrounded by tough men my whole life, and every single one of them would cut off their own arm before raising it against a defenseless woman. I understand why my dad and uncles have been so strict with us now, and I'd give anything to be able to hug them all and thank them for all the bodyguards and constant text check-ins and the refusal to let us go out on our own no matter how hard we begged. I get it. I fucking get it, and if I make it out of here, I'll never complain about any security measures ever again.

Alexei steps closer while his dad smiles at him from across the room. Like father, like fucking son. He cracks his knuckles and looks down at me. His chest is decorated with Bratva tattoos that cover every inch of his muscular body. I don't stand a chance in hell, even if my hands weren't bound.

"I wonder how long before you pass out," he says, eyeing me like he can't wait to cut me open to see what's inside.

I desperately hope it'll be quick, and in what might be an insane attempt to make that happen, I smile up at him, wanting to piss him off enough so that the first punch will knock my ass out.

“Probably a pretty long time since you’re such a fucking pussy. I’m glad my dad kicked your bitch ass. If you hadn’t tied my hands behind me, I bet I could kick your ass too.”

I have just enough time to see his eyes go dark with rage before he yells, “Start filming,” and pulls his arm back for the first punch. I don’t get my wish. I don’t pass out with the first punch or the next or the fucking next. I try like hell to not scream so my dad doesn’t have to hear it, but I lose that battle pretty early on. I can’t help it. He’s slowly killing me with each hit, and I can’t do a goddamn thing to stop it. I cling to thoughts of Dominic, wanting to die with a piece of him surrounding me, even if it is all in my head. I won’t let this bastard take that from me. He might be killing me, but I’m going to decide what to think about while he does it. He’s not going to take this from me. I fight like hell to ignore the pain and fill my head with the man I love until finally my vision starts to darken and I let go.

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Chapter 15

Dominic

I pace the floor of Lev's kitchen, feeling my sanity slip a little more with each passing second. It's been eight days since I last saw Natalya, and I'm not sure how much more of this I can take. All five of the Melnikov brothers look exactly how I feel. This isn't easy for any of us, but we still haven't been able to find Alexei or Adrian Zolotov. It seems the two men are just as paranoid as we are and they don't tell their men anything they don't absolutely need to know. The three Zolotov men we found and tortured for information were of zero help to us, and it's put us all in a foul mood.

Matvey scrubs a hand over his face, one that's still covered in dried blood from the fucker we just finished up with, and lets out a heavy sigh. "I miss my wife."

If this were any other situation, I'd laugh my ass off at the sight of a bloody Bratva boss looking so devastated because he misses his wife, but the truth is we all feel the same damn way. The only difference is that Natalya isn't my wife yet, and I have to hide how I feel about her.

"Tell me about it," Vitaly grumbles. "If I have to jerk off over Skype one more time, I think I might cry. It's so fucking depressing."

Lev leans against the counter, and I've never seen him look so out of it before. The dark circles under his eyes make it clear he hasn't slept in days. He looks like a man who's about to snap. He starts to pour himself another vodka when one by one all their phones start to go off. My heart stops in my chest, and when I meet Lev's eyes, I can tell we're both thinking the same thing. Something is wrong. Something is very fucking wrong.

While they reach for their phones, I grab mine and send a text to Natalya, asking if she's okay. It's after three-thirty in the morning, and when I don't get a response, I hope like hell it's because she's sleeping peacefully, but my gut tells me I'm wrong. My instincts are usually spot-on, and right now they're screaming at me.

"What's going on?" I ask when I see Lev's face pale. Nothing fazes this man, and now he's so pale he looks like he might pass out. When his eyes meet mine, reminding me so much of his daughter, I want to tell him to stop, that I've changed my mind and I don't actually want to hear what he's about to say, because I know the next words out of his mouth are going to break me.

"Natalya's gone."

His voice is barely more than a whisper, but I hear it all the same. I grip the edge of the counter, feeling the last of my sanity start to crumble. I can't lose her. I won't fucking survive it.

Roman is only a couple of feet away, but his voice sounds like it's coming from another room when he says, "Andrik is missing, and Vitya was stabbed. Jolene said she and Natalya couldn't sleep and made some tea a little after two, then she went and laid down. She woke up to Svetlana screaming and ran to see what was going on. She found her by the back door with Vitya. He must've been coming in for his sleep shift when Andrik got to him. That's why no one noticed he was missing. The others were outside patrolling around the house like they were supposed to."

"No one else is missing," Danil adds, "and they found prints outside the house and on the path in the woods. Boot prints and then Natalya's bare feet."

I bite back a groan. All I can think about is how much my sweet girl hates putting her bare feet on the ground. She must've been terrified, and I wasn't there to keep her safe. I failed her. I completely and utterly failed her.

Danil sighs and puts his phone on the counter so we can see the map on the screen. Small dots pulse across it, and when he scrolls into the spot with a large number of them, he says, "Her phone is at the house. We can't use it to track her."

"There has to be a way to find her," I say. "I don't care if we have to tear this goddamn city apart piece by fucking piece. There has to be a way to find her."

They're all too worried about Natalya to notice how badly this is killing me, but Vitaly walks over and squeezes my shoulder, and I swear I almost hug the fucker.

"We can track him," he says, squeezing my shoulder again and silently begging me to keep my shit together.

"Fuck yeah we can." Matvey smacks the counter and looks over at Lev, who's now on the phone with a distraught Jolene and trying to calm her down. "Andrik has been with us for two years, and the stupid fuck decided to switch sides, but I'm guessing he didn't ditch all his equipment when he kidnapped an unarmed woman and ran into the woods like a little bitch."

I look at them, not understanding why they suddenly look excited. Vitaly smacks my back and says, "We put trackers on everything—phones, vehicles, their weapons. You name it, and we've probably put a tracker on it. That stupid fuck has no idea that he's a giant beacon leading us right to him."

Lev promises Jolene that he's going to find their daughter and then promises to call her back as soon as he knows anything. Once he hangs up he waits while Danil pulls up the info on his phone.

"Fuck, brother, tell me you can track him before I lose my goddamn mind."

I've never heard Lev sound scared before, but there's no hiding the quiver in his voice. Not being able to protect his daughter is killing him, and I know exactly how he feels. If she was taken right after her mom went to bed, then she's been gone for almost ninety fucking minutes, and neither one of us wants to think about what that could mean.

Before Danil can answer, he gets another message on his phone. I watch him click on something, and a second later Natalya's screams fill the room.

"Jesus fuck," Lev groans, gripping the counter for support as he drops his phone onto the granite like it's burning him to hold it.

I grab it and then wish like hell I hadn't because the movie playing on his screen is going to haunt me until the day I die. Natalya's beautiful face is bloody and swollen, and her hands are tied behind her back. She's in nothing but her pajamas, and she looks so damn small compared to the man who's beating the hell out of her. I let out a pained groan when he pulls back and punches her so hard she's thrown back onto the hard floor. She's not moving, and I swear my heart fucking stops beating until I see the faint

rise and fall of her chest. The man laughs and kicks her hard in the ribs, pulling one last scream from her before she passes out.

When I look up, the room is silent, and the men around me share the exact same expression that I know I'm wearing—shock, disgust, and a murderous rage that's pushing closer and closer to the surface.

"Who the fuck is that man?" I ask them.

"That's Adrian Zolotov," Lev says in a voice that I barely recognize as his.

When his phone buzzes, we all look down at it, terrified of what we're going to see next. There's a small moment of relief when I see it's a message and not another video. It's in Russian, so I turn to Vitaly.

"What's it say?"

He avoids looking at me. "They're going to keep hurting her," he says, but I can tell he's holding back.

"I need to know what it says."

"It's not good," he says, keeping his voice low.

"I need you to tell me what the fuck that message said."

Still whispering so Lev doesn't have to hear it again, he tells me, "It said, *The next video will be of me taking your precious daughter's virginity, Lev. The last video will be of me killing her. You fucked with the wrong family.*"

Bile threatens to rise up the back of my throat, but I tamp it down and look to Danil. "What's the fucking address? Where are they holding her?"

He's already showing the satellite footage and a map to the others, and when he looks up at me, I can tell he's surprised by the rage in my voice.

"They're an hour north of the farmhouse. It's a brick house out in the middle of nowhere."

I'm already typing out a message for Dario and walking towards the door when Roman runs over to me and grabs my arm to stop me.

"Let me go," I tell him, jerking my arm away. "If I leave now, maybe I can get there before he makes the second video."

"We're going together," he tells me.

"Roman, I don't fucking have time for this."

"I don't know what the fuck is going on between you and my niece, but she's *my* niece, Dominic, and I'm not going to let you put her life in more danger because you aren't thinking clearly."

He looks back at his brothers. "Text everyone the address. The guards stay at the farmhouse, and everyone else is to go to Natalya." He turns his head towards the hall and yells for Luka, Max, and Val. The boys were trying to get a few hours of sleep, but they all come running out at the sound of Roman's voice. Luka is pulling on a shirt with the other two right behind him, and as soon as they see their dads' faces, they know something has gone very wrong. Roman fills them in on everything, and minutes later we're leaving the apartment.

"I'm riding with you," Vitaly tells me.

"I'm not going slow so the others can keep up," I warn him.

"Fine by me."

He gets in the passenger seat while I read Dario's response of *On our way* and get in the driver's side. He calls Katya, speaking to her in Russian while I peel out of the garage and race out onto the street. I wasn't kidding about not going slow. They all have the address and can meet us there, but I have the fastest goddamn car, and I'm going to put it to good use.

Even at this hour, the roads aren't empty. I weave my way through the very early morning traffic, ignoring the angry honks and pissed-off looks. They can all go fuck themselves. I'm not slowing down for anyone or anything, and as soon as I merge onto the interstate that will take us north, I creep up past two hundred on the speedometer while Vitaly buckles his seatbelt and ends the call with his wife. I see several cars behind me, the burnt orange color of Val's Jaguar, Roman's black Porsche, and Danil's Aston Martin, but when I push the car to two-twenty, the distance between us grows.

"Don't you dare get us killed," Vitaly says from beside me.

"No way in fuck am I dying before I save Natalya," I tell him. "Hear anything else?"

He swipes through his messages before answering. "Matvey's driving so Danil can get more satellite footage." After a few seconds, he gets a new text. "He said there's only a couple of cars parked out front. I guess they thought the house was secluded enough to not warrant bringing a bunch of men."

"They'll regret that soon enough," I say, passing a semi truck and hoping there aren't any state troopers watching this stretch of the interstate. I don't have time to fuck around with cops. Every second feels like a lifetime. My mind replays a constant loop of the video I watched, adding in

all the imagined horrors that could be happening to her right this very second. He's already a dead man, but if he rapes her, I will skin that fucker alive and then set him on fire.

"We're going to get her back. She's going to be knocked out for a while after the beating he gave her."

He stops, and I know it's so he can get control of himself. This may not be killing him in the same way it's killing me, but it's still killing him all the same. Natalya is like a daughter to him. I can see the love in his eyes every time he looks at her. This is personal for all of us.

"We'll get there before he starts the second video," he finally says, and I can tell by his tone that he refuses to accept the possibility of any other outcome. I'm right there with him. I can't let my mind go there. I'll never come back from it if I do.

The drive is the longest of my life, and by the time I slow down to hit the turnoff, I'm running on nothing but rage and adrenaline. "Where is it?"

Vitaly looks down at his phone's screen. "Take the first right."

I do as he says, following the deserted side road. I'm forced to slow down because it's a gravel road with way too many curves in it. When I come around another corner, Vitaly points ahead of us.

"Park up there next to that fence. The house is right beyond that. We can go on foot the rest of the way."

I don't argue. The last thing I want is for them to see us coming and decide to cut their losses by killing Natalya and running off. I park off to the side and then reach over to the glovebox, pulling out the extra gun and bullets I leave in there. Vitaly checks his own weapon while I get out of the car and do the same. I already have one gun in a shoulder holster, but you can never have too many weapons, so I stuff the extra clips in my pocket and click the safety off on the gun I'm still holding.

"The others are about ten minutes away. We need to wait for them."

I check my phone again. The last text from Dario is him letting me know that my men are right there with the Bratva. They're all together, all about to arrive, and then we'll have more than enough men and weapons to take care of any threat that might be waiting for us. The smart thing would be to wait, but my heart is telling me to run up to the house and shoot my way in. Before I can take a single step towards the house, Vitaly's hand is on me, gripping my forearm tightly.

“Don’t even fucking think about it,” he warns. “We’re waiting for the others, and then we’re going to circle this place and close in. We get one shot at this, and I’m not going to let you fuck it up at the last second because you’re not thinking clearly. Adrian didn’t bring a small army with him, but there are enough men to put up a good fight.”

When I hesitate, he says, “If you weren’t in love with the woman we’re about to rescue, what would you be doing right now?”

I turn my head to glare at him, because he already knows what I’ll say. “I would wait for the others and circle around the motherfucking house.”

He can’t bring himself to smile, but he does let go of my arm and smack my back. “Exactly. Now calm the fuck down. They’ll be here in less than two minutes.”

I stare in the direction that I know the house is in, feeling like my heart is slowly being squeezed with each passing second. I was raised in a catholic family, but I’ve never been much of a believer. I’ve seen too much shit, and the day we found my sister’s body sealed the deal on me ever believing in a benevolent being on high. I may not be able to pray to a god I don’t believe in, but that doesn’t stop my mind from reaching out to Isabella. I believe in her, and I have to believe that a part of her is still out there somewhere, that she didn’t just completely disappear when that bastard stole the life from her, so I beg her to watch over Natalya because losing the woman I love will be the end of me. I’m as certain of that as I’ve ever been of anything.

I’m still silently begging my sister for help when I hear the sound of tires crunching on gravel. Looking back, I see the long line of cars, and within seconds they’re parked and heavily armed men are running towards us.

“Anything?” Lev asks, looking as murderous as I feel.

“No,” Vitaly tells him. “We haven’t heard or seen anything. We need to circle the property and close in.”

The order get passed around, and when the men start to fan out, I feel Dario and Sandro come up on either side of me. Dario hands me an earpiece, and I put it in, making sure it works and that I can hear the others.

“We’re going to get her back,” Sandro tells me in Italian.

I look at my cousins, knowing they’d give their lives for me in a second, but that’s not what I need right now, so I meet their eyes and say, “Her life comes first, and that’s a fucking order.”

Sandro nods, but Dario hesitates. When he sees that there's no way in hell I'm backing down from this, he finally nods and says, "Fine."

That one word is all I need, and when Vitaly and his brothers start making their way to the house, my men and I are right there with them. Dawn has fully hit, ruining any cover the darkness may have given us, but it also makes it easy to scan the overgrown field and determine it's empty, mainly by the simple fact that no one's tried to shoot at us yet. I don't see anyone except the men who came here with us, but I know our luck can't last too much longer. Experience has taught me a lot of things, and one of those hard lessons is that nothing is ever as easy as you'd like it to be, and another is that nothing is ever as it seems.

I look over to see that Roman, Danil, and Vitaly each have their sons close to them. The younger generation has been allowed to join us, but they're only being given a limited amount of freedom on this mission. They're here mainly to learn and because it involves their cousin. They have a right to be here, to see firsthand what happens to someone who fucks with their family because soon it's going to be their job to make sure the women are protected and the men who dare to threaten them are dealt with.

The brick house comes into view, but we're still unseen, hidden by the tall grass in the field that's easily waist high. Luckily, I've been wearing nothing but tactical gear all week and I'm not having to crawl my way through this shit in a suit. Keeping one of my black boots firmly on the ground, I rest my other knee in the loose dirt and keep my gun trained on the house. I'm positioned at the side, and I can see two men near the front corner. They're armed, guns in hand, but they're pointed down, and I can tell by the lazy glances the men are giving the field we're currently hiding in that they're not nearly as alert as they should be. The Zolotov Bratva has gotten lazy. If my men acted like this, I'd shoot them myself just for the principle of it.

I hear Russian in my ear, and I hiss out a quick, "In fucking English," because I need to know what the hell is going on and no one in the Bratva speaks Italian, so English is going to be our language of the day.

The same man who was just speaking starts again but this time in English. His accent is so thick I can barely understand it, but I'm not about to complain.

"Nine armed men around house. No visual on woman."

I recognize Roman's voice when he says, "We take them out on the count of five, and then I want everyone in that fucking house. Keep the men inside alive if possible, but Natalya's safety comes above all else."

I raise my gun and aim it at one of the men in front of me. I choose the fucker who's leaning a shoulder against the house, relaxing and smoking a goddamn cigarette while my woman is being tortured inside. Fuck him. The quick death I'm about to give him is way too good for him, but I don't have time for anything else.

Roman starts the countdown, and as soon as he gets to one, I fire my gun, hearing the others do the same, and watch the man's head jerk back with the bullet I've just put in his brain. Several other bullets hit him and the man standing beside him. Their bodies jerk and flail from the impact, but I don't stop to watch and enjoy their deaths. I run for the front door, Lev and my cousins right beside me.

The front door is unlocked, but sneaking in isn't something I'm worried about since there was no hiding the gunshots that just went off moments before. I have just enough time to meet Lev's eyes before we both step in, guns raised and ready to do whatever it takes to save Natalya. Somewhere in the distance, I hear the sound of the backdoor being kicked in, and then yelling in Russian and a gun going off.

Lev and I run through the living room and straight into hell. The kitchen floor is covered in blood, some of it splattered onto the cabinets, most of it pooled on the floor, and Natalya's barely conscious body is bent over the table. Alexei is standing behind her, one hand gripping her shorts like he was in the act of pulling them down before we barged in and ruined his fun. I can't see his other hand, though, and I have no idea if he's pressing a weapon to her.

I point my gun at his head. "Get your fucking hands off her."

Alexei grins and then looks at Lev, who's still standing right beside me. "Your daughter's been a lot of fun to play with, but we're just getting to the good part."

"If I see your dick, I'm shooting it off," Lev tells him, lowering his gun so it's pointed right at Alexei's crotch. "Now get the fuck away from my daughter."

"Do it," Adrian says, looking over at his son. I wouldn't call the look he's giving him concern or even anything resembling love. It's more

calculating. He's a Bratva boss with no sentimental attachments. He's already trying to figure out how he can negotiate his ass out of this.

My eyes run over Natalya. She's bleeding from so many places that it's impossible to tell how many wounds she has, but her chest is moving, and when her blue eyes meet mine, I see them fill with fresh tears.

"Let her go, Son," Adrian says again. "You've had your fun. It's time for the bosses to talk now."

Alexei looks like a petulant child who's just had his favorite toy taken away when he finally steps back, giving Natalya's ass a hard smack as he does so. She winces from the pain, looking like she's seconds from passing out. Matvey grabs Alexei from behind, roughly shoving him to the ground while Roman does the same to Adrian.

Lev and I close the distance, both of us running our eyes over her, terrified of touching her and causing more damage to her beaten body. I can tell by her breathing that he's cracked at least one rib, probably several, and the wrists that are tied behind her back are swollen and her fingers are turning a purplish-blue color that has me quickly reaching for my knife.

"I've got you, *principessa*," I murmur, not caring that her dad can hear me. I very carefully cut the tight fabric from her wrists, grimacing when she moans from the pain.

She tries to say something, but it's more of a choked cry than anything else.

"It's okay, princess. You're safe now," her dad tells her, gently stroking her head, and I can tell he's fighting back tears. I think Lev could withstand any kind of torture thrown at him, but not this, not seeing his daughter bloody and beaten and in so much pain she can't even talk.

Natalya tries again, and when Lev hears the "D-" she starts to say, he leans closer to her, but instead of the *Dad* he's expecting, "Dom" falls from her lips. I register the hurt look on his face right before I bend down and kiss her cheek.

Pressing my lips to her ear, I whisper, "I'm here, baby. I'm right here, and I'm not going anywhere."

She relaxes at my words, and after running my hands over her enough to convince myself that moving her isn't going to cause a spinal injury or internal bleeding, I very carefully pick her up and cradle her against my chest. She whimpers in pain and then slumps against me, one hand clutching my shirt like she's scared to death I'm going to let her go. I want

to tell her that's never going to fucking happen again, but before I can, Lev steps closer and kisses his daughter's head.

"I love you, honey." He kisses her forehead again and whispers, "I'm so sorry, princess."

When he meets my eyes, the look he gives me isn't nearly as sweet. He's not going to say anything and risk upsetting his daughter, but it's clear that he and I are going to be having a chat very fucking soon. I give him a tight nod, letting him know I'm ready whenever he is, because I'm not backing down from this. I'm marrying his daughter whether he likes it or not.

"I love you, Dad," Natalya whispers, completely oblivious to the silent conversation going on above her.

Lev kisses her head once more and then grabs his phone so he can call Jolene and let her know their daughter is okay. With Natalya in my arms, I take a quick look around the room. A man I don't recognize is bleeding from a shoulder wound while Danil and Max zip tie his wrists behind his back. The same is being done to Andrik. The two Zolotov men are being led roughly from the room by Roman and Luka, and I wish I could see the look on Adrian's face when he realizes he's not going to be able to negotiate his way out of this, but that would require me to leave Natalya, and that's not going to fucking happen. He and his son will be dying slow deaths. Maybe I'll be able to witness and take part in it and maybe I won't, and for the first time in my life I really don't give a fuck. The woman curled up in my arms, who's in so much pain she can only take shallow breaths that I feel hitting my neck, each one a reminder that she's alive but broken, has completely changed my priorities in life. Bloodlust takes a backseat to the love I feel for her, because she's more important to me than anything else.

I carry her to the porch and bring her closer so I can kiss her head. "I'm so sorry, *principessa*," I whisper against her skin.

"I'm okay." Her words are nothing but a featherlight whisper against my neck. "Take me home, Dominic. I want to go home."

"I'm taking you to my house." I'm not sure which home she's thinking of, but as far as I'm concerned she only has one, and it's mine. "My doctors will be waiting to take care of you. We're going to get you fixed up, sweetheart. I just need you to hang on a bit longer."

She lets out a breath, and it almost feels like she's trying to laugh but can't manage it. "That's what I said. Take me home."

I kiss her head again and walk her out front. A couple of the Bratva's black SUVs are now in front of the house, and when I head to one, Vitaly and Val walk over to meet us. Pyotr, the man who works as a medic for the Bratva, is with them, and when he motions towards Natalya in silent permission to touch her, I nod my head and reluctantly lay her down on the SUV's backseat. She grabs my hand, wanting me to stay, and I quickly kiss it.

"I'm not leaving you ever again, *principessa*. You don't need to worry about that."

She gives me a faint smile as I brush back a strand of her hair. It's covered in blood, but so is the rest of her. Most of her cuts have clotted and dried, but a couple of them are still bleeding freely.

Pyotr scoots in and inspects her face before handing me some bandages to press to the ones that are still bleeding. I keep one against the biggest cut, the one that's high up on her forehead near her scalp while he examines the rest of her. His touch is gentle, but she still hisses out a breath when he feels along her ribs.

"At least three cracked ribs," he says, confirming what I'd already suspected. "I don't think they're broken, though." He speaks in English so I can understand him, telling me that she'll need stitches for a few cuts on her face. When he lifts her shirt to look at her stomach, I groan at the sight of the bruising that's already started.

Lev walks over, eyeing his daughter's beaten body like he's searing the image into his brain. He won't ever forgive himself for this, just like I'll never forgive myself for it. We both love her, and we've both failed her. When he scrubs a hand over his face, I notice it's covered in fresh blood, but I can tell it hasn't calmed him in the slightest. No amount of revenge is going to make this situation okay.

"I don't think she has any broken bones or internal bleeding," Pyotr says, gently pushing down on her stomach, "but she should be seen by a doctor as quickly as possible to make sure."

"I'm taking her to my house. I have a doctor who will be waiting and ready."

Pyotr nods, but because he's with the Bratva and doesn't work for me, he looks to Lev for confirmation. Lev shoots me a look that makes it clear I'm still not his favorite person, but he nods his head at Pyotr because he knows my doctor will take damn good care of her.

The medic leaves, and I toss my keys to Vitaly. “I’m riding in here with her. Can you drive my car back for me?”

Vitaly catches them and Natalya surprises everyone by saying, “Don’t trust him. He drives like a maniac.”

Her voice is still barely more than a whisper and it’s laced with pain, but we all hear it. I see the relief that flashes in Lev’s eyes at hearing his daughter not only speak but crack a joke, and Vitaly gives her a big smile and reaches in to gently squeeze one of her legs.

“Why do you think Sveta drives the way she does? I taught her everything I know.”

Natalya reaches down and squeezes his hand, and I swear she’s about to make a bunch of hardened criminals cry if she keeps this up.

“I’ll bring her to see you as soon as the doctor says it’s okay,” he promises her.

“Thanks, Uncle Vitaly.”

He gives her hand another gentle squeeze and then steps aside so Val can lean in and give her a quick hug. His face isn’t revealing much, but his eyes are. He may be learning how to run a Bratva, but this is his first time seeing someone he cares about hurt, and I wish I could tell him it would be the last, but life’s too goddamn short for useless lies.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” he whispers. “Don’t ever scare me like that again, Nat.”

“I’ll do my best, Val,” she whispers back, and I can hear the exhaustion in her words. Her body is shutting down, trying like hell to heal itself.

He kisses her head and then leaves to join the others while Matvey gets in the driver’s seat and Lev walks around to the passenger side. I’m still squatting uncomfortably in front of Natalya, and when she reaches for me, I gladly pick her back up and sit where she’d just been laying, keeping her tucked up against my chest where she belongs.

The ride back is a quiet one. Natalya dozes off and on while Matvey and Lev hold a conversation. If their low voices didn’t make it clear that they don’t want me involved in it, then their insistence on keeping it purely in Russian would. I’m more than fine with not being included. All my focus is on Natalya, watching to make sure her chest keeps rising and falling, kissing her forehead when she whimpers in her sleep, and whispering how goddamn much I love her.

When we finally pull into my driveway and I carry her inside, Dr. Bianchi is ready and waiting with Tony, the med student he's convinced is the man who will eventually take his place. Dario called ahead to fill them in on everything, and within minutes I'm carrying her into the room that would rival the city's best hospital. I've spared absolutely no expense, letting Dr. Bianchi get whatever the hell he needed, and the result is a sort of mini hospital that can handle just about anything.

"Dominic," Natalya moans, clutching at my hand.

"I'm right here, baby," I tell her. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Yes, you are," Dr. Bianchi informs me. Ignoring the look I give him, he smiles down at Natalya. "I'm glad to see you back in our home, young lady, but this isn't how I wanted to do it." He points to the dark-haired man next to him. "This is Tony. I'm training him, and he's going to help me take a look at you."

Tony smiles down at her while his blue eyes take in her injuries from behind his dark glasses. "It's nice to meet you, Natalya."

She gives him a weak smile and clutches my hand tighter.

"I promise you can see Dominic in just a few minutes, but Tony and I need to run some tests and examine you, and it'll go a lot quicker if Dominic isn't here taking up space and glaring at us every time we touch you," Dr. Bianchi tells her.

When she hesitates, he says, "He'll be right outside those doors."

She looks at the doors we just came in and then back at me. "You'll come if I call?"

"Nothing could stop me, *principessa*," I promise her.

When she nods, I kiss her, softly pressing my lips to hers. "I love you," I whisper.

"I love you, too."

I kiss her again and then stand and leave so she can get taken care of. I walk across the hall to the room we'd made into a waiting room of sorts. There are a couple of couches and chairs and a counter in the corner with a coffeemaker and a small fridge. It's a room where our men can wait if someone they care about is in surgery, and it's the first time I've ever had cause to use it.

As soon as I step in, I turn to face Lev. He's waiting for me like I knew he would be. His four brothers stand beside him, making it clear whose side they're on. I expected nothing less. I can feel the anger radiating off him,

and when he rears back and punches me in the jaw, I don't try and stop him. I give him this one shot because I deserve it. I fucked his eighteen-year-old daughter and took her virginity when he trusted me to keep her safe. I deserve every damn bit of this punch, but when he pulls back to give me another, I raise my hands.

"You got your hit, Lev. I'm not going to just stand here and let you take another."

"You motherfucker," he yells at me. "I trusted you, you fucking bastard!"

"I know, and I'm sorry we kept it from you. We were going to tell you after the Zolotov threat was taken care of."

He shakes his head in disbelief, still looking like he's going to attack me at any second. Lev is an excellent fighter, a man no sane person would ever willingly go against, but I'm not about to back down.

"I love her," I say, and he lets out a harsh laugh.

"You're old enough to be her goddamn dad."

The others watch as Lev starts to pace the small room we're in. At the sound of footsteps, I look up to see Dario and Sandro. They eye the Melnikov brothers and Dario asks in Italian, "What do you want us to do?"

"Nothing," I tell him. "He's just pissed. He's not going to try and kill me."

I'm not entirely sure I'm right about that last part, but there's enough tension in this room without adding my men into the mix.

"Let's just relax and talk about this," Vitaly says, taking a step closer to Lev while giving me a *Thanks so much for involving me in this shitstorm* look.

"There's nothing to talk about," Lev tells him. "He was supposed to watch over my daughter and instead he fucked her and then fucked with her head so she's infatuated with him now. She's only eighteen! She doesn't know what the hell she wants."

"Okay, don't punch me right now, but Jolene was only nineteen when you met her." Vitaly holds his hands up and lets out a forced laugh when Lev glares at him. "I'm just saying that sometimes you do know what the hell you're talking about when you're that young."

"Alina was eighteen when we started our relationship," Matvey adds.

Lev turns to him. "Don't you fucking start. This is my daughter we're talking about." He looks back and points a finger at me. "We have a

goddamn photo of him holding her at your wedding, Matvey. That's fucked up!"

"I mean, it's a bit taboo," Vitaly agrees, "but it's not like he helped raise her. He was gone the whole damn time because he's a big wuss about changing diapers."

I raise a brow at him but don't comment. He's not completely wrong. I had no desire to be anywhere near a diaper.

"What are your plans?" Roman asks. "Where do you see this going?"

"Yeah, you've always made it clear you didn't want anything serious. Is this just a fling for you?" Danil asks.

"It's not a fling," I tell them. "I love her, and I want to marry her."

"Fuck you," Lev says, but it's not quite as forceful as the last time he said it. He walks over and sits down on one of the couches, exhausted and worried and trying like hell to process what I've just thrown at him.

The rest of us follow suit and take a seat. We sit in silence, no one wanting to break the small truce we've established, but Vitaly can only hold out for so long.

"I found a grey hair on my balls the other night when I was trimming up, and I don't know what to do about that."

"Jesus fuck," Matvey groans, looking over at his brother.

Roman sighs while Danil fights a laugh.

Lev just says, "I don't know what the fuck you expect me to do with that incredibly personal bit of information you've just shared with all of us."

Dario mutters a "These Russians are crazy as fuck" to Sandro in Italian, and I don't bother correcting him because my cousin's not wrong.

"The point is life is short," Vitaly continues like that should've been obvious from his grey ball hair story. "We're getting older. We've reached the grey ball hair stage of our lives."

"Speak for yourself," Matvey says with a soft laugh. "Not all of us have reached that milestone."

Vitaly scowls at him. "We're the same age, Matvey. Don't fucking pretend that I'm the only one getting grey pubes."

"I mean, I can't say I've found any either," Roman says.

"None here," Danil says with a laugh.

"Oh, fuck all of you," Vitaly says. "I know you're all lying right now, but whatever. In my grey ball hair wisdom, I'm telling you that life is short,

too short to be getting pissed because Natalya went and fell in love with a fucking Italian.”

“Hey,” Sandro starts to say, but I wave my hand at him.

“Don’t worry about it. He doesn’t know any better. His mom didn’t teach him any manners,” I tell him.

Vitaly laughs. “She sure as fuck did not.” He gestures towards himself. “This is what happens when you let a group of five wild Russian boys raise themselves.”

Matvey shrugs. “I think we turned out pretty damn good.”

Vitaly smiles at him. “We did, brother. God, we could’ve been so much worse.” He looks between me and Lev, a smirk playing at his lips. “So, Lev’s kind of like your dad now.”

“Jesus,” I groan, making them all laugh, well, everyone except Lev and I. We stare at each other, the realization hitting us at the same time. He’s going to be my father-in-law. Goddamnit.

“Don’t you fucking dare call me Dad,” he warns me, and even with my jaw throbbing and starting to swell, I can’t help but give a small smile because that’s as close to his blessing as I’m ever going to get, but I’ll take it.

Before Vitaly can crack another joke, Tony steps into the room and looks at me. Speaking in Italian, he says, “She’s fine, Mr. Alessi. There isn’t any internal bleeding, and her ribs should heal nicely. Dr. Bianchi gave her a mild sedative, but don’t worry, she and the baby are doing just fine.”

Dario and Sandro jerk their heads to look at me while Lev asks, “What the fuck did he just say?”

Chapter 16

Natalya

This first thing I notice is pain, the second is someone gently stroking my hand like they're afraid to touch me anywhere else, and the third is the beeping of the machine next to me. I feel sluggish and opening my eyes takes more effort than I would've thought possible, but as soon as I get them open, I hear Dominic's voice and then see his gorgeous, worried face as he leans over me.

"God, *principessa*, I've never been so scared in my life." He kisses me so carefully, and I know I must look as bad as I feel. "You're never leaving my side again."

"That's fine with me." My voice is raspy and dry, and he quickly grabs a glass of water for me when he hears it. "I never wanted to leave you to begin with."

The guilt on his face makes me instantly regret my words. I reach out and squeeze his hand, noticing the IV that someone's connected me to.

"This is not your fault, Dominic."

He hands me the water and shakes his head. "I'll never forgive myself for what happened to you."

"It was Andrik. He grabbed me and put a gun to my head when I was walking back to my room."

The memory has the machine I'm hooked up to beeping even faster as my heart speeds up. Dominic eyes it warily.

"You're safe, Natalya." He sits down on the edge of my bed. "I need you to calm down, sweetheart."

I take a steadying breath and then finish the last of my water. God, how long have I been asleep?

“He killed Vitya,” I whisper, and despite what Dominic just said, the beeping speeds up again when I remember all the blood surrounding his body. Guilt washes over me at knowing he died because of me, and when I start to cry, Dominic scoops me up and then takes my spot in the bed while keeping me on his lap. He makes sure all the cords attached to me are untangled and then wraps his arms around me, kissing my head and holding me while I sob against him.

“Vitya’s alive.”

I lift my head to search his brown eyes, but I know he’d never lie to me. “How?”

“Svetlana woke up after you were taken and came downstairs to search for you. She found Vitya and screamed for help. She stayed with him, putting pressure on his stab wounds the whole damn time. He’d lost so much blood and never would’ve survived the drive to a doctor, so as soon as she heard they had the same blood type, she demanded they do a vein-to-vein transfusion. She saved his life.”

“That sounds like her,” I say, taking the tissue he offers me. “She can be very stubborn.”

He raises a brow at me. “Sounds like someone else I know.”

“I’m not stubborn. I just know when I’m right.”

He smiles and kisses me again, gently running his fingers through my hair when I rest my head on his chest again.

“Why the hell does it hurt so much to breathe,” I ask him. “How many ribs did that asshole crack?”

“Three.” I can hear the anger in his voice, but he’s still so gentle when he touches me. “You also have stitches on your forehead, and just about every part of you is a shade of purple or blue. You’re going to be very sore for a few weeks, but he didn’t do any lasting damage, not physically anyway.”

Sliding his hand down, he cups my face and gently turns me so we can see each other. He looks like a man who’s just been through hell. His hair is a mess, there’s a darkening bruise on his jaw, it’s obvious he hasn’t been getting enough sleep, and I swear he’s lost a few pounds, but none of it takes away from how damn gorgeous he is.

I reach up and run my fingers along his cheek, feeling the coarse hairs against my skin. I don’t think he’s shaved since I left a week ago, and it looks good on him.

“I can tell you haven’t gotten enough sleep.”

“Of course I haven’t,” he tells me, not even bothering to deny it. “I can’t face my bed without you in it, and what little sleep I’ve been getting, I’ve been doing it on the couch in my office.” He drags the pad of his thumb along my cheek. “I’ve missed you so goddamn much. I knew I loved you before you left, but this week has taught me that I can’t fucking live without you.”

He gives me the sweetest smile and then reaches into his pocket. When he pulls out the large pink diamond ring, I’m too stunned to speak. I open my mouth and try, but nothing comes out, so I just end up gaping at him while he gives a soft laugh.

“This is not how I imagined doing this, and I swear I’ll make it up to you with the biggest, most beautiful wedding you can imagine, but I need to make you mine, *principessa*. I need to see my ring on your finger.”

I feel the tears start to fall again, and I have to force myself to stay calm because breathing deeply is too damn painful right now. The ring is gorgeous, like something a real princess would wear, and it’s so damn sparkly I find it hard to look away.

“You got me a pink diamond,” I whisper.

“Of course I did. I know what my girl likes.”

I smile, but I still can’t stop looking at the sparkly ring in front of me.

“Eyes on me, beautiful,” he teases, waiting for me to look away from the huge, sparkling rock in his hand.

“I love you, Natalya. I could easily say I fell in love with you as soon as I saw you step out of Sveta’s car in those sexy heels and pink dress, but as beautiful as I thought you were, it was your sweetness that really caught my attention and the passionate way you stand your ground when you’re willing to fight for something.”

He smiles and squeezes my hand. “Also, your refusal to walk on the ground in your bare feet is the cutest goddamn thing I’ve ever seen.”

I smile and give a soft laugh. “Parasites are nothing to mess around with.”

He laughs and kisses my forehead. “I promise I’ll always carry you whenever you need me to. I will love and protect you and be faithful to you. I never want to be without you, Natalya. I want to marry you and raise a family with you. I want to fall asleep next to you, and the first thing I want to see when I wake up is your face.”

Hooking a finger under my chin, he looks down at me, searching my eyes and letting me see all the love in his.

“Will you marry me, *principessa*? Will you be my wife?”

“Yes,” I whisper, because saying no was never going to happen. I love Dominic, and I have to trust that everything will work out between our families. Not having him isn’t an option, so everyone is just going to have to get onboard with it. I love them all too much to lose any of them. We’re going to be one big happy family whether they like it or not.

“Yes?” Dominic asks like he’s afraid to believe that I’ve just said I’ll marry him, and it’s fucking adorable.

“Yes,” I say again. “I’ll marry you, Dominic, but I don’t need a big, fancy wedding. I just need you.”

“Well, you’re getting both, *principessa*.”

He smiles and slips the ring on my finger before cupping my face and pressing his lips to mine. I know he’s being gentle because every part of my body is sore from what that fucker did to me, but I need more. I need to feel him against me, to feel the connection that we share, and to be reminded of what we have.

My face is swollen and aches from the punches I took and the stitches in my forehead, but his lips help push it all away and make it impossible to think about anything other than the way his mouth feels on mine. I open for him, wanting more, and the groan he gives is filled with a longing that matches my own. His tongue swipes along mine, igniting little sparks of pleasure deep in my core. For a few blissful moments, I forget about the pain. I forget about the terror I’d felt when Alexei was hitting me. I forget about everything because Dominic won’t allow it to hurt me anymore. His gentle touch and deep kiss make damn sure that the only thing on my mind is him and his love for me.

He pulls back before I want him to, and when I try to bring him closer again, he smiles and softly runs his thumb over my bruised cheek.

“I want nothing more than to kiss you for hours, sweetheart, but you’ve been asleep for almost a full day and your family is dying to see you.”

“What?”

I start to sit up and then wince at the pain in my ribs. “I’ve been asleep that long?”

“Dr. Bianchi gave you a mild sedative, but your body was exhausted.” Keeping me on his lap, he lightly runs his hand up and down my arm. It’s

soothing and makes me soften against him again.

"I need to tell you something, *principessa*, but I'm worried about how you're going to take it."

My body tenses at his words as dread runs through me. I'd been so out of it when they found me, but I don't remember anyone in my family getting hurt, but now all I can think is that something awful happened that I'm not aware of.

"My family," I start to say, unable to even ask the question.

"Baby, they're fine," he quickly says. "God, I didn't mean to scare you. I would never not tell you something like that. Everyone is fine. I promise."

Knowing my family is okay has my heart rate calming a bit, but I'm still too on edge to fully relax. "Then what is it? What do you need to tell me?"

He runs his hand down my arm again before bringing it to my stomach. I'm wearing a giant T-shirt that must be his, and he pushes it up so he's against my bare skin. His large palm is splayed across me, and when he softly runs his thumb over my skin, I let out a soft gasp. There's more to this than just him wanting to touch my stomach.

"Are you trying to tell me what I think you're trying to tell me?" I ask him.

His warm brown eyes search mine, carefully watching me to make sure I don't get too upset or stressed, but beyond the worry is a hopeful look, a look that's dying to be excited about this and waiting for permission from me before he gives it full rein.

"Dr. Bianchi did a blood test when you were first brought here to check a few things, and one of the things he did was a pregnancy test."

I rest my hand on top of his, on top of the life we've created. "But it's so early. It's barely been two weeks since we first had sex."

"A blood test can detect a pregnancy very early." He keeps stroking my stomach with his thumb. "Tell me what you're thinking, *principessa*. Are you happy? Is this too much? I know how young you are, and I don't want you to feel trapped with me."

I stop him before he can keep worrying about shit that I would never think.

"Dominic, I'm happy," I tell him. "So unbelievably happy."

His whole face lights up in the biggest smile I've ever seen him give.

"Is the doctor sure that everything's okay, though? Alexei didn't cause any damage?"

His smile falters at the reminder of what happened. “No, sweetheart. He said the pregnancy is early enough that everything should be fine. You’re going to be monitored very closely, though, just to make sure.”

“I bet I will be.” With a doctor living in the house, I’m guessing I’ll be monitored on a daily basis.

Dominic smiles and kisses my head. “I wonder if our baby is going to be half as stubborn as their mommy.”

I laugh as much as my ribs will allow. “Look who their daddy is. This poor kid doesn’t stand a chance at being even-tempered.”

“I’m not that bad,” he says with a laugh.

Looking down at our locked hands, I still can’t believe I’m pregnant. It’s so early I haven’t even started having symptoms yet. I imagine my stomach growing rounder with each passing month, and then I think about Dominic with a baby and my eyes start to tear up again, because even though I’m not having morning sickness yet, my hormones are clearly all over the place.

“Are you sure this is what you want? You always said you never wanted a family. What if you decide it’s too much? What if you decide you’d rather have the sexy, unattached supermodel instead of the wife who’s struggling to lose her pregnancy weight and a baby with colic and dirty diapers?”

He looks so hurt by my question that I almost regret asking it, but I need to hear his answer.

“Please don’t ever doubt how I feel for you, *principessa*. I love you, and I would never cheat on you. I don’t give a fuck about other women. I don’t want them. I only want you.”

Moving his hand so it’s now on top of mine with my palm pressed against my stomach, he gently squeezes me. “You and our baby are all I want. It’s true I never wanted a family, but that’s because I wasn’t with you. I never wanted a family *with anyone else*.”

Tears start spilling out because that’s really damn sweet. He kisses my wet cheek and whispers against my skin.

“I will love every stage your body goes through, and I won’t be able to keep my hands off you through any of them. That I can promise you, *principessa*. I will happily stay up all night long with our baby when they have colic so that you can sleep, and I swear I’ll learn how to change diapers and do feedings and bath time. I’m going to learn everything

because you're my family, and there's nothing more important to me than that."

He lets out a soft laugh. "Plus, I'm not getting any younger, and I kind of have my heart set on a big family."

I pull back so I can see him and give him a wide-eyed look. "Since when?"

He shrugs his broad shoulders and smiles. "Since the moment I came inside you, sweetheart. It's all I can fucking think about."

He laughs at my shocked look and kisses me again. "Do you feel well enough to see your family? I'm guessing your dad's about to tear down the door in just a few seconds."

At the mention of my dad, I start to worry again. I don't know how I'm going to tell him everything, and the last thing I want is to see anger or disappointment on his face. Dominic hears the machine that I'm going to detach myself from as soon as I figure out how, and furrows his brow in worry.

"I really hate that thing," I tell him.

"I'd know you were upset even without it," he tells me, and I believe him. He reads me so damn easily. "You don't need to worry, though. Your dad knows about us."

"He does? Is he mad?" I run my eyes over his bruised jaw. "Did he hit you? Is that where the bruise came from?"

I reach up to touch him, running my fingers lightly over his sore jaw before he grabs my hand and kisses it.

"I'm fine, baby. He was angry with me at first, but we've come to a sort of truce about it. Your Uncle Vitaly helped smooth things over."

"He's pretty good at that," I say, easily imagining him cracking a joke in an effort to diffuse the situation. "I'm kind of surprised he did, though. I can't imagine he's thrilled about us."

"He wasn't at first, but I made sure they all know how much I love you. Once they realized I wasn't just fucking around and being a dick, they decided it might be better to not kill me."

He smiles, but I'm guessing he's not completely joking. If my dad and uncles thought he was using me, they'd definitely try to kill him.

"Do they know about the baby?"

Dominic shakes his head. "No, I wanted to tell you first."

I sigh and try to muster up some courage. “Okay, let me go to the bathroom since I’m about to burst after sleeping so long, and then we can bring them in.”

He helps me get out of bed, and then I have to spend several minutes convincing him that I’m okay to pee by myself. He still insists on standing right outside the door, but I’m too exhausted and sore to worry too much about him hearing me use the bathroom. Some battles just aren’t worth fighting.

Once I’m settled back into bed, he makes sure my IV pole is back where it should be and still dripping fluids into me, but when he goes to reattach my heart monitor, I shake my head.

“I’m fine. I don’t need that thing.”

He raises a dark brow at me, but I don’t budge.

“If Dr. Bianchi thinks I still need it, I’ll reattach it, but I’m fine for now. I don’t want that damn thing beeping at me while I talk to my family.”

He looks like he wants to keep arguing with me about it, so I holler for my dad before he can get the words out. His mouth drops open right before my dad comes barreling in to see me. Dominic cups the back of my head and leans in close, pressing his mouth to my ear so only I can hear him.

“Oh, *principessa*, be happy I love you more than life itself.”

I let out a soft laugh and kiss his cheek. “I love you just as much.”

He kisses my ear and then pulls back so he’s standing beside my bed. My dad stands at the end of it, looking between the two of us but not saying anything. He looks as exhausted as Dominic does, and my heart breaks at the sight of him.

I look up at Dominic. “Do you mind giving us a few minutes?”

He kisses my forehead and tells me he loves me and to call when I need him. I smile at him and squeeze his hand before he walks out, leaving the two of us alone. I’ve always been close to my dad, and it kills me to have this distance between us. I meet his eyes, and when the corner of his mouth lifts up, moving his lip ring in a smile that’s as familiar to me as my own, I start to cry.

“I’m so sorry, Dad,” I start to say, but before I’ve even gotten the words out, he’s sitting on my bed and pulling me in for a hug.

“I’m the one who’s sorry, princess. I’m your dad. It’s my job to keep you safe, and that bastard just took you. Hell, I’m the one who assigned him to the house.”

“It’s not your fault. No one could’ve known he’d switched sides, and I’m okay now. That’s all that matters.”

“He’ll pay for his betrayal with his life, but it doesn’t change what happened to you.” He pulls back just enough to get a good look at my face. “I once saw your mom looking like this, and I swore I’d never let it happen to anyone else that I love.”

I’ve never seen my dad cry before, but I swear he’s seconds away from it now. His blue eyes look glassy, and his voice is thick and trembling slightly.

“I failed you, and I’ll never forgive myself for it.”

I grab his hand and shake my head. “You found me and saved me.” I wave a hand at my body. “This will all heal, and you got there before he could do anything worse.”

“God, I don’t know what I would’ve done if we’d gotten there any later,” he admits, looking horrified at the idea of it.

“You got there in time,” I remind him. We’re both sitting on the edge of my bed, so I rest my head on his shoulder, feeling like I used to when I was younger and my dad was the safest place I could ever imagine being. He’s always been my hero in so many ways, and I may not remember every detail of my rescue, but I do remember using the last of my strength to call out for Dominic instead of him, and I imagine that must’ve broken his heart.

“I’m so sorry I didn’t tell you about Dominic, Dad. Please don’t be mad at me, because I can take a lot of things, but you being disappointed in me isn’t one of them. I swear I never meant to hurt you. It just sort of happened, and we were going to tell you as soon as the Zolotov threat was taken care of.”

He cups my hand in both of his and kisses the top of my head. “I could never be mad at you, princess. I’m just not capable of it. I’m not going to lie and say I wasn’t furious at him, but never at you, honey.”

“Please don’t be mad at him.” My words are shaky, and when he hears how upset I am, he pulls back so he can see my face.

His eyes search mine, and after several seconds I see his lip ring move as he gives me a soft smile and shakes his head like he can’t believe what he’s seeing.

“You really do love him, don’t you?”

“Yes.” He’s been holding my right hand, and when I put my left hand on top of his and he sees the large diamond on my finger, he mutters something that I’m happy I don’t catch.

“He doesn’t waste any time, does he?”

“Dad,” I say, and he smiles at my tone. “Seeing me like this terrified him, and we both want to be together, so why wait?” I give a soft laugh and add, “Plus, it’s not like he’s getting any younger.”

My dad laughs and gives me a wink. “The next time he pisses me off I’m going to tell him you said that.”

I laugh again and then wince at the pain in my ribs. My dad’s eyes narrow, anger and hurt radiating off him as he looks me over.

“I’ll tell Dominic to make sure your ribs stay iced. That’s what I did to help your mom.”

“What happened to her?” He looks like he doesn’t want to tell me, but I just sigh and say, “You guys have way too many secrets. Does it really matter if I know?”

“We just wanted to protect you from the world, from how ugly people can be.” He lets out a breath and gives my hand another soft squeeze. “Not that it’s done any good. Violence has a way of finding our family.”

“You all gave me and my cousins the best childhood any kid could ever hope for, Dad. We were surrounded by love and always felt safe, but I’m not a little girl anymore. I can handle whatever you want to tell me.”

“You’ll always be my little girl, princess. That’s never going to change.” After a few seconds, he sighs and pats my hand before scrubbing it over his jaw. Like Dominic, he hasn’t shaved in several days, and he looks like he could easily sleep for a week straight.

“I met your mom because her brother was into underground fighting. I regularly kicked his ass, and he kept coming back for more. Your mom approached me one night because she wanted me to teach her how to fight so she could defend herself. I realized her brother was beating her, and that didn’t sit well with me.”

My heart breaks for my mom. She’s one of the happiest people I know, and now I know why. People are rarely that happy unless they’ve first been in a shit situation. If you’ve always known good, then it’s easy to take it for granted. My mom never has, though. Every time she sees my dad, her eyes light up, like he’s her everything. I could’ve easily ended up a spoiled brat who never appreciates how good she has it, except I was raised by a family

who has endured pain, and they handed those hard-earned lessons down to their kids. I owe my family everything.

My dad brushes my hair behind my ear. “I fell hard and fast for your mom,” he admits with a grin. “And I’ve never regretted it for a second. She’s my whole world, and she gave me you and Sasha and Mia. I can’t imagine my life without any of you, and if you think falling in love with a stubborn Italian is going to push me away from you, then you don’t know me at all, princess.”

I wrap my arms around him and give him as tight of a hug as I can manage. “I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, honey, more than you can imagine and nothing will ever change that.”

“I have one other thing I need to tell you.”

He rubs a hand over my back like he used to do when I was little. “Lay it on me, kiddo. If I can handle my daughter being engaged to Dominic fucking Alessi, then I can handle anything.”

“You sure about that, Grandpa?”

I feel his whole body go still, and his voice is barely a whisper when he asks, “What did you just say?”

Pulling back so I can see him, I take a breath and say, “I said you’re going to be a grandpa.”

“Jesus, I thought that’s what you said.” He doesn’t look angry, just completely knocked-on-his-ass stunned. “How long have you known?”

“About twenty minutes. I had no idea, Dad. I would never have hid a pregnancy from you and Mom.”

His face pales when he realizes what this means. “That fucker beat you while you were pregnant?”

“Dr. Bianchi said the baby is fine. I’m in the very early stages, Dad, less than two weeks pregnant.”

“Jesus,” he says again. “He was already going to get a slow death, but I’ve just tacked on a few excruciating hours for endangering my grandbaby.”

I don’t bother trying to talk him out of it, and the truth is I don’t want to. I hope Alexei dies a painful death and he’s forced to shit himself before he takes his last breath. The bastard doesn’t deserve an ounce of mercy, and he’s sure as hell not going to get any from me.

He laughs and shakes his head. "Your Uncle Vitaly is never going to let me hear the end of this. He's already trying to get Dominic to call me Dad."

"He isn't," I say, trying not to laugh.

My dad lifts a pierced brow at me. "He is."

I know he's dying to bring my mom in, but before he calls for her, he cups my face and looks at me. "Are you happy, Natochka?" He only ever calls me that when he's feeling especially sentimental, and hearing it has me getting all emotional again. "Is this really what you want, because if you're unsure, even if it's just a little bit, I want you to know that your family will take care of you no matter what. We'll help you raise this baby, and you'll both be surrounded in love and want for nothing."

I give my dad a wobbly smile as I fight the tears because I know he means every damn word of it. "Thank you, Dad, but I really do love Dominic, and I want to marry him."

He kisses my forehead and then gives me a playful wink. "You can't fault me for trying."

I laugh because I know he's joking...kind of.

"*Malinkaya*," he yells, hollering for my mom who bursts through the door in record time before running over to me and wrapping me in a careful hug while she sobs into my hair. My dad holds the two of us and lets us cry, telling us both that he loves us until he finally says, "You two are breaking my heart here. Please stop crying."

My mom kisses my head and then leans into my dad's embrace, letting him comfort her. He whispers something in her ear, and I see her nod before she looks back over at me.

"Are you okay? I've never been so scared in my whole life." She starts crying again, and my dad puts her on his lap and holds her, whispering in her ear and rubbing her back until she's sobbed herself out.

"She's fine, *malinkaya*. I would never lie to you about that," my dad tells her and then looks over at me, giving me the chance to speak if I want to, but also letting me know that all I have to do is nod and he'll do it for me. I smile at him, grateful for what he's offering but knowing I need to be the one to do it.

"Mom, there's something I need to tell you."

She wipes the tears off her cheeks and then wraps an arm around me, pulling me in closer. "What is it?"

I hold up my left hand and give her a smile. “Dominic’s asked me to marry him, and I’ve said yes.” Before she can process what I’ve just said, I go ahead and lay the rest of it on her. “And you’re going to be a grandma. I’m pregnant.”

My mom’s eyes widen, but then she smiles and kisses my head. “Are you happy?”

“Yes,” I whisper, squeezing her hand back. “I’m so happy, Mom.”

“Then so am I.” She kisses me once more and then turns to my dad. “I can’t believe we’re going to be grandparents.”

“I know. We look way too young for that,” my dad says with a laugh.

My mom laughs and grips my dad’s arm. “I just realized that I’m going to be younger than my son-in-law.”

My dad laughs and kisses my mom. “That’s so fucked up,” he says with another laugh.

“You two can stop laughing now,” I tell them, fighting my own smile.

“You gotta admit it’s kind of funny,” he tells me.

I don’t admit anything, and when Mia pokes her head in the door, I’m saved from having to. When I wave her in, Sasha comes in right behind her, and they both give me a hug and ask if I’m okay.

“Holy shit,” Sasha says when he notices my ring.

“Language,” my mom reminds him.

“Sorry, Mom, but look at that ring.”

“Are you really marrying him?” Mia asks.

“I am,” I tell her, and since it might as well all get out in the open, I add, “and I’m pregnant.”

“Eww,” is Mia’s response, but she gives me a smile to let me know she’s only partly serious, while Sasha kisses my head.

“I’m happy if you’re happy, sis,” he tells me, and I love my family so goddamn much that I start to cry again.

“Dominic,” my dad shouts, and when my gorgeous fiancé steps back into the room and sees me crying, he’s by my side in seconds, cupping my face and leaning down to see me better.

“What’s wrong, *principessa*?”

“Nothing. I’m just happy,” I manage to sputter out.

His shoulders visibly relax when he realizes I’m okay, and then he kisses me and scoots me back up into the bed and hands me a glass of

water. My dad watches him like a hawk, making sure he's taking care of me like he should.

"You need to ice her ribs," my dad tells him.

Dominic raises a brow at him. "I iced them while she was sleeping, and I'll be doing it again. Don't worry, Lev. She'll be taken care of. My doctor will be watching her around the clock and so will I."

"Lovely," I say, knowing I won't be able to take a breath from here on out without someone making a note of it.

"It's nonnegotiable," my dad and Dominic say at the exact same time.

I look between the two of them and then turn to my mom, who's trying very hard to not laugh.

"I mean, they're not wrong," she finally manages to say. "For a second there, I was afraid that I'd constantly be worried about you, but seeing as you've chosen to marry a man who's exactly like your dad, I guess I can stop worrying."

My dad looks at her and frowns. "We're not alike."

"You're both incredibly protective of Natalya." She holds up her hands and laughs. "That's all I'm saying."

The two most important men in my life look at each other, and it's an awkward few seconds before my dad finally lets out a soft groan and extends his hand out to Dominic.

"I'll kill you if you hurt her," my dad says, and that's the closest thing to a *welcome to the family* that Dominic is going to get.

My fiancé knows this, so he just smiles and says, "I expect nothing less. I'm fully aware that you and all of your brothers and sons will gut me slowly if I ever do anything to hurt Natalya, and as you can see I'm not even slightly worried about it because I will *never* hurt your daughter."

I can tell this is a conversation they've had before because my dad just grunts and says, "You better fucking not, or I swear to god I'll shoot you again, and this time it won't be in your goddamn shoulder."

Mia looks ecstatic at the possibility of violence while Sasha studies the two men, his face a mask of indifference. I never really know what's going on inside my brother's head, and I'm not so sure I want to.

"Okay," my mom says, attempting to diffuse the situation. "I'll let everyone else know you're okay. The family's going to want to visit you soon to see for themselves that you're fine, especially Sveta and Yelena. They've been worried sick about you."

“Thanks, Mom.” I return her hug and kiss, and even though I’ve slept for a day, I’m already getting tired again.

“I love you, honey,” my dad says, kissing me on the head before Mia and Sasha give me a hug goodbye.

I’m already yawning by the time they get to the door. Once they’ve left, Dominic sits on the edge of the bed, looking down at me like he still can’t believe I’m here and okay.

“Can I please go back to your room? I don’t want to stay down here.” He looks like he’s about to insist I stay here, so I cut in before he can. “You can watch over me just as easily up there, except the bed is a lot more comfortable.”

He leans closer with a smile on his face. “I wasn’t going to tell you no, *principessa*, and it’s *our* bedroom, not just mine.”

Turning his head, he yells for Tony, and within a few seconds the man I remember hooking me up to everything comes rushing in. He looks me over, making sure I’m okay. He doesn’t seem thrilled when he sees that I’m no longer connected to the beeping machine I now detest, but he doesn’t demand I put the cuff back on. His dark hair is disheveled, and he looks like he’s only a few years older than me. His glasses are slightly crooked like he’s just thrown them on, but even with them partially hiding his face, it’s obvious the guy’s good looking. My heart belongs to Dominic, though, so even if I was connected to that damn machine, my heart rate wouldn’t show a spike right now.

“I’m taking my fiancée upstairs,” Dominic tells him. “Can she be disconnected from her IV, or do I need to bring it upstairs with us?”

It’s clear Dominic isn’t asking for permission to move me, so Tony just comes over to check the IV bag and then he takes my temperature and gently feels my ribs and inspects my face.

“She’s okay without the IV. She needs to eat something and keep her fluid intake up, though, and she needs to rest as much as possible. Her ribs are going to be very sore for the next couple of weeks.”

“She’ll get everything she needs and then some. I’m not letting her out of my damn sight, and you can just as easily check on her upstairs as you can down here.”

Tony pauses at Dominic’s tone before giving a slow nod of his head while gently removing the IV needle from my hand. He’s good, and I barely

feel the sting of the large needle being removed. “Of course, Mr. Alessi. I’ll be up to check on her later.”

I’ve got to give the guy credit, he doesn’t go pale or look like he’s about to shit himself. Tony isn’t a hardened criminal, not yet anyway, but he’s holding his own against my fiancé, and I see the respect in Dominic’s eyes before he buries it deep.

“Text me first. I don’t want her disturbed if she’s sleeping.”

Tony puts a bandaid on the back of my hand. “Yes, sir.”

I don’t bother telling the two alpha males that I’m sitting right here and they can stop talking about me like I’m absent. I’m too tired, and I know Dominic’s overbearing ways are because he loves me and he’s terrified something else might happen to me or our baby.

When I start to yawn, Dominic nudges Tony aside and carefully scoops me into his arms, keeping the blanket wrapped around me so I’m not flashing my butt. He kisses my head and carries me out the door.

I turn my head and quickly say “Thank you” to Tony before we disappear down the hall.

“My fiancée is so damn sweet,” he tells me with a small smile playing at his lips.

“He helped me,” I say. “The least I can do is say thank you.”

“He’s getting paid a lot of money to do that, *principessa*, and he knows I would’ve killed him if he hadn’t.”

“I’m going to assume you’re joking.”

He lets out a soft laugh and gives me a wink. “Whatever helps you sleep at night, sweetheart.”

I’m too tired to get into a discussion about when it’s appropriate to kill someone and when it isn’t. I’m guessing it wouldn’t do any good anyway, so I keep my mouth shut and rest my head against his chest. I’m asleep before we’ve even made it up the stairs.

Chapter 17

Dominic

I watch over Natalya for the next few days, icing her ribs and bringing her the homemade soups Lucia makes, until she finally rolls her eyes at me and tells me yet again to stop worrying and that she's fine.

Well, that's never going to fucking happen, and that's exactly what I tell her.

"You're a stubborn man, Dominic Alessi."

"And you're a stubborn woman, Natalya Alessi."

She smiles at the sound of her soon-to-be name and reaches out to run her fingers through my hair when I lean down to lift her shirt so I can kiss her stomach. It's my new favorite thing, and I do it all the time. She never pushes me away or looks annoyed by my doing it, and I love her so fucking much for that. She just lets me nuzzle and kiss her stomach as much as I want. I'm obsessed with the idea of our baby growing inside her. I went from never wanting kids to having it be all I can think about.

"You're going to be such a good daddy," she tells me.

I turn my head, resting my ear against her soft skin. "I hope so."

"You will be," and there's not a trace of doubt in her voice.

I smile and kiss her stomach, slowly trailing a line down. It kills me to see the dark bruises that mar her perfect skin, but I know it could've been so much worse. I nuzzle her with my nose, breathing in her sweet scent. I've missed her so fucking much. I haven't been inside her since the day she left my house, and it's been slowly driving me crazy. She lets out a moan when I give her a soft nip, and I'm just about to hit her panties when my phone dings with an incoming text. I groan and kiss her stomach again before lifting up. I know who it is. I'm convinced Lev, with his eerily

accurate timing, is determined to cock-block me from his daughter for the rest of my life.

Natalya gives a soft laugh. "Tell my dad I said hi."

"It's not funny, *principessa*. I know he's doing it on purpose. I don't know how the fuck he knows every time I'm about to slip some part of myself inside you, but he does. I'm turning my goddamn phone off the next time I get in bed with you."

She smiles and keeps playing with my hair while I read the text.

If you want a piece of him, you'd better get your ass to the warehouse.

"Everything okay?"

I look over at Natalya's bruised, swollen face, remembering every single thing that fucker did to her, and it takes everything I have to say, "Everything's fine, sweetheart. Nothing to worry about."

She raises a brow at me, because she's not an idiot and the girl can read me like no one else can.

"Go, Dominic. Go do what you need to do."

"I don't want to leave you. The last time we were apart you got hurt."

"That was different, and the threat is gone. I'm safe here, and I know you'll feel better after you do whatever the hell you're about to do that I don't ever want to know the details of."

The rational part of me knows she's right, but it doesn't mean I have to like or accept it. Kissing her stomach again, I try to convince myself that I don't need to be there when Alexei takes his last breath, that I can let my need for revenge go because all I need is right in front of me, but all I can think about is the way she'd looked when he'd had her bent over the table, pawing at her shorts like a fucking animal while she begged him to stop.

"Go," she whispers again, gently tugging on my hair. "You'll never be able to let it go, and we both know it. You need to see this through to the end, Dominic."

I look at her sweet face, the one that's now covered in cuts and bruises, and I know she's right. I can't let this go. I can't stand back and let someone else take the revenge that's mine. He hurt the woman I love, and I need to feel his blood on my hands. That's all there is to it.

"How can you read me so easily?"

She smiles and runs a finger along my cheek. She seems to enjoy a bit of facial hair, so I've been keeping a very light beard for her. Grazing the thick stubble, she says, "Because I love you, Dom."

My heart fucking melts at hearing her say that. How the hell she's managed to tear through the walls I've always surrounded myself with so damn quickly and efficiently, I'll never know, but I'm so glad she did.

"I can't imagine going back to the life I used to have. The thought of not having you with me breaks something inside me, *principessa*."

"You won't ever have to," she promises me. "Now go and get your piece of that bastard before my family finishes him off."

"There's the Bratva princess I fell in love with."

She laughs and cups my face, gently pulling me so I'll scoot up closer. Her palms are on my cheeks and her blue eyes stay locked on mine. "Give him something special just from me."

I run my eyes over her swollen, discolored cheek and the line of black stitches on her forehead. "I promise, *principessa*, he will die in a lot of pain, knowing that it's because he dared to lay his hands on you."

"That probably shouldn't make me as happy as it does."

"It's not wrong to want revenge, sweetheart. It's not wrong to want him to feel a small piece of what he did to you. He beat you, and then he was planning on raping and killing you. No amount of pain I can give him will ever be enough to make up for that."

"Well when you put it like that," she says, giving a small laugh.

I know she's still in a lot of pain, and even with icing her ribs on a strict schedule, every breath she takes is still a painful reminder of what that bastard did to her, and yet she's still able to smile and laugh with me. I think I'll always be in awe of her.

"Go," she says again, but instead of pushing me away, she pulls me closer. "But kiss me goodbye first."

I smile and run my thumb over her pouty, top lip. "Such a bossy little thing."

"You have no idea what you've gotten yourself into."

I laugh and ghost my lips over hers. "Whatever it is, it's worth it, *principessa*. You're worth everything to me."

She starts to smile right as I press my lips to hers and cup the back of her head, threading my fingers in her hair and holding her still. Catching her top lip between mine, I give her a hard enough suck to make her moan and then slide my tongue in to meet hers. She opens for me, deepening the kiss and grasping the back of my neck, making it clear I'm not going anywhere until she's had her fill.

Her soft moans have my dick painfully hard and pressing uncomfortable against my pants. She sucks my tongue, and I wish like hell I could slide into her. I want to consume her like she consumes me. I don't want any separation between us, and when she drags her fingers through my hair and bites my bottom lip, I know I'm seconds away from losing all control.

Alexei and the slow, painful death I have planned for him disappear from my mind, because there's no room for any of that shit when my fiancée is whimpering softly and kissing me like she'll never be able to get enough.

I'm seconds away from freeing my cock and ripping her panties off when she winces and breaks our kiss to suck in a quick breath.

"Fuck, baby, I'm sorry." I pull back, appalled that I've caused her pain, but she clutches at my shirt, refusing to let me go.

"I'm fine. I just moved too quickly and my body reminded me that I still have three cracked ribs."

When I still look horrified at the idea of hurting her, she pats my cheek and says, "Give him a little something extra for all the sexual frustration he's making us endure."

I kiss her again, much more gently this time, and say, "I will, *principessa*, and then I'm coming home and burying my head between your legs. I may not be able to fuck you like I want, but I can't allow you to be unsatisfied."

Dragging my hand up her thigh, I cup her pussy in a possessive grip, pressing my thumb against her swollen clit as she moans and rocks up to me.

"My pride won't allow it, sweetheart."

"Good," she whispers, making me laugh while I give her one last stroke and then pull my hand away.

"Get some rest, fiancée. You're going to need it."

She smiles up at me. "Hurry home."

Standing up, I lean down and give her one more kiss. "I love you."

"I love you too," she whispers. "Tell my family I said hi."

I give her a wink and then make sure her phone is next to her before grabbing my suit jacket and leaving the room. Dario and Alessandro are in the kitchen with Lucia. They've decided it's their favorite room in the whole damn house, and Lucia loves every second of spoiling them. She

hasn't stopped smiling since I told her Natalya agreed to marry me and that she's pregnant.

When I step in the room, she turns her smiling face to mine. "Is Natalya okay? Does she need anything?"

I walk over and pat her shoulder. "She's fine, but I need to go take care of something."

Dario immediately lifts a brow at me while Sandro looks over while taking a huge bite of his calzone. He's curious, but not curious enough to stop eating.

I look down at Lucia. "Maybe you could bring her up some food in a little bit. She hasn't eaten enough today."

She nods, because she and I are in complete agreement about Natalya upping her calories. Just the thought of her beautiful body growing rounder with her pregnancy has me smiling. I'm curious how big I can get her ass, and I can't wait to find out. Every stage of this pregnancy is going to be celebrated and enjoyed to the fullest.

Lucia pats my cheek. "It's good to see you so happy. I knew you needed a family, and I can't wait until there's a little baby in the house. I've already started knitting a blanket."

"What color is it?" I ask, and then laugh at the embarrassed look she gives me.

"Blue," she admits, but then adds, "I can easily make a pink one if needed."

"I'll be happy with either a boy or a girl," I tell her. "As long as Natalya and the baby are healthy and safe, I don't care."

"True enough." She smiles even bigger and adds, "Plus, you can always have more."

I laugh, but she's not wrong. I plan on filling this house with babies. My sweet *principessa* might just end up pregnant all the time.

I'm still smiling about it when Lucia goes back to cooking and I lean against the counter near my cousins. Sandro still has a mouthful of food, and Dario is still waiting for me to tell him where the hell I'm going.

"Hurry up and finish that, Sandro. Lev invited me to the party, and we need to get there before those crazy fuckers kill him."

He smiles and pops the last of his calzone into his mouth before standing and pushing his plate aside. "Thanks, Lucia. Delicious as always. I'd marry you in a second if I thought you'd have me."

She laughs and swats her hand in his direction. “You couldn’t handle me,” she tells him, making us all laugh.

Dario’s all business, pulling his keys out and glancing back at us on his way to the front door. “I’ll drive.”

“They’re at the warehouse right outside of the city, the one that’s closest to our territory in the north,” I tell him, and he nods, letting me know he remembers the spot.

Both of our families have various properties located in and around the city. Hell, my family’s real estate company helped them buy several of them. They’re all under various corporations, all of our names hidden beneath a labyrinth of paperwork that no one will ever be able to decipher. It’s still a small risk, but it’s a necessary one because having a place to torture and kill that isn’t on your own personal property is a fucking must in this line of work.

I send a quick text to Lev, letting him know we’re on our way and to save me a piece of the bastard. He gives me a thumbs up, so I’m assuming that means there will at least be a little life left in the guy for me to snuff out.

Dario gets us to the abandoned-looking warehouse in record time, thanks to his refusal to leave behind his Italian way of driving and take up a more cautious approach to things like obeying speed limits and stoplights. He pulls in beside Matvey’s black Camaro, and when we step inside, the derelict façade of the place transforms into a large, soundproofed room with ample space for all five Melnikov brothers, their older sons, plus me and my two men.

The brothers give me a nod while Vitaly walks over with a smile and claps me on the back. “About fucking time. Don’t worry, Dom, we saved you some fun.”

I look around, surprised to see Sasha standing next to his cousins.

“It’s his sister,” Lev tells me. “He’s earned the right to be here.”

“He has,” I agree, not even bothering to argue. I was involved in shit like this at a way younger age, and I can understand his rage about his sister and the need to do something about it, and if the sixteen-year-old is having a hard time dealing with the violence, he’s hiding it damn well. The dead look in his eyes could rival any I’ve seen on far older, more hardened career criminals.

I give Sasha a nod and then look over at Alexei Zolotov. I frown and turn to Lev. "Are you sure he's even still alive?"

Alexei is hanging from a chain, naked, and they've beaten him so badly that I never would've recognized him on my own. His hair color isn't even visible because it's coated in dried blood. Both eyes are swollen shut, I don't think he has a goddamn tooth left in his mouth, and both of his Achilles heels have been severed, leaving his feet to hang uselessly beneath him.

"He's fucking breathing," Lev says, and then because he's still pissed that I've been fucking his daughter, he adds, "Be happy you were even invited, Alessi."

"Yeah, he's still a little sore about everything," Vitaly mutters under his breath.

Matvey walks up to Alexei and gives him a rough push so he starts to swing. The movement pulls a pained groan from Alexei while Matvey smirks and gives me an *I told you so* look.

"Where's Adrian?" I ask.

Danil shrugs and then laughs. "The old man couldn't handle the torture. His heart gave out about halfway through."

"And Andrik?"

"That was Bratva business," Roman says, making it clear that I was never going to get an invite to that particular party, and as much as I would've liked to have hurt that little fucker for kidnapping Natalya, I'm confident his death was sufficiently gruesome and slow.

Lev walks over to stand in front of me. Sandro takes a respectful step back, and Dario waits a few seconds longer than necessary, eyeing Lev the whole time, before slowly taking one step back. It's a smaller step than Sandro, and we all notice it. I see Lev's lip ring move up in a smirk at my cousin's small show of defiance.

Lev holds a bloody knife out to me and raises a pierced brow. I know what's being offered here, and for a second I'm too surprised to take the bloody blade from him. The man hanging from the ceiling tried to rape his daughter. Natalya wasn't married or engaged at the time, and as her father, it's his right to cut the man's dick off and take the kill, but he's not. He's giving it to me.

"That's so fucking sweet," I hear Vitaly say from somewhere behind me, and then I hear what sounds like a package being torn open. When I

look over my shoulder, he's opening a bag of gummies with hands that are covered in dried blood and giving me a sort of sweetly sentimental look that makes me want to punch the fucker. He sees my look and smiles even bigger. "Why don't you give your dad a hug? I think we'd all enjoy seeing that."

"Jesus Christ, Vitaly," Lev groans. "I'm not his fucking dad."

"Father-in-law, whatever," Vitaly amends and mutters to his son, "Potayto, potahto," and then pops a gummy in his mouth from the bag the two of them are sharing.

"He's not going to last much longer," Lev says, pulling my attention back to the bloody knife he's offering me.

I take it and give him a tight nod. "Thanks, Lev."

He shrugs like it's no big deal, but we both know it is. I assumed they'd let me have a little fun with Alexei, but Lev is offering me so much more.

"Just make it hurt as much as possible."

"I will," I tell him, because there was never any doubt about that.

"Wake up, Alexei," Vitaly says in a sing-song voice. "You aren't going to want to miss this."

He tosses a bag of fruit snacks to Dario, who gives him a *What the fuck?* look before I turn to put all my focus on the man in front of me. Stepping closer, I run my eyes over him, taking in the bruised, bloody body without an ounce of sympathy. It reminds me of when my dad and I had killed the man who murdered my sister. I'd felt nothing then. By the time we'd found him, I'd felt more empty than anything else, but I don't feel empty now. There's a murderous rage brewing inside me, and I'm about to let it out.

"I know you can't see me, Alexei, but do you know who I am?"

His eyes remain swollen shut, but he turns his head at the sound of my voice. It's not a big movement, but it's enough to let me know that he's still alive and coherent. He mumbles something, but with the way they've torn his mouth to shreds from all the punches, there's no way in hell he's going to be able to form words.

"I'm Dominic Alessi," I tell him, saving us all the frustration of having to listen to him mumble and moan an answer. "When I first saw you, you had just beaten my fiancée and were in the process of trying to rape her." I scoot in closer so the next time I speak, I'm inches from his face, making him flinch in surprise. "My *pregnant* fiancée."

He moans, and I'm sure if he could speak, he would go on and on about how sorry he is, about how he didn't mean to, and about how he never would've dared lay a finger on her if he'd known she was mine. He'd spew all kinds of bullshit if he thought it might save him or earn him a quick end to his misery. Too bad for him I'm not the forgiving type, especially not when it comes to my *principessa*.

"There are few things I hate in life as much as a fucking rapist, Alexei. You're an asshole, a fucking pathetic man who preys on women, and you deserve every fucking thing I'm about to do to you."

I step back and take my suit jacket off and toss it at Sandro. He almost doesn't catch it because Vitaly has apparently decided to share his snacks with him as well and his hand is full of them. I try not to think about sticky hands touching my expensive Armani jacket.

Alexei has no idea what's coming, and his body shakes in fear, trying like hell to guess what's about to happen. Making him unable to see was a stroke of fucking genius, and I'm glad it adds to his torment. I'm sure it's nothing compared to how scared my girl was, though.

I punch him in the side, hitting the ribs that someone has already broken, earning a satisfying scream from Alexei. I let it run through me, feeding the darkness that's always lived inside me. Normal men don't survive in the mafia. It's not a job that any sane man can handle, but for as long as I can remember, I've fucking thrived in it. It's the only kind of life I know, so I embrace it and punch him again and again and again, only stopping when I know a few more punches will kill him, and he's not allowed to die yet.

Grabbing his limp dick, I press the blade against the base of his shaft. "Natalya says hi, Alexei. This is from her," I tell him, smiling at the whimper he gives when I press the blade in harder and see-saw the knife across his tender skin. I fight back my own need to cringe, because as much as he deserves this, I still can't help but imagine how fucking bad this would hurt.

When I'm halfway through, I hear Vitaly say, "Ouch. It's making my dick hurt just watching this."

A few more back-and-forth swipes of the blade and his dick is severed and I'm tossing it aside to roll away on the concrete floor.

Alexei gasps, sobbing as blood and snot seep from his broken nose. He has only a few minutes left, so I make the most of it. I press the blade

against his balls, angling the blade so I'm as high up as I can get.

"And this is from me," I tell him, sawing through and cutting off his nutsack before tossing it to lay next to his severed dick.

"Fucking gross, man," Vitaly tells me, but I'm too busy watching Alexei bleed out from the gaping wound I've given him to comment.

He's going to die exactly how a fucking piece of shit like him should die—in an extreme amount of pain and knowing that not a single person is going to give a fuck that he's no longer breathing. I make no excuses for the cold-blooded killer I am, but I don't prey on women, and I've never killed anyone who didn't deserve it. Is that toeing the line of ethics? Maybe, but I don't give a fuck. Life is never black and white, and for those of us who live in the dark grey areas, there are still lines that no man should ever cross.

"Nicely done," Lev says, walking over and standing next to me so we can both watch Alexei take his last, shaky breath. I keep my eyes on his chest, making damn sure it's no longer rising and falling, and when I'm satisfied that he is really dead, I hold my hand out so Dario can toss me a rag. After I've cleaned the blade, I hand it back to Lev.

"Thanks for letting me end him."

Lev's arms are crossed over his chest, one hand scratching at the scruff on his face, deep in thought and clearly not eager to say what he's about to say. Finally, he looks over at me.

"It was your kill. He beat and tried to rape Natalya. She may be my daughter, but she's *your* woman. When Sebastian hurt Jolene, all I could think about was hurting him and making him pay. If her dad wasn't the piece of shit he was, I still wouldn't have wanted to step aside and let him take care of it. The kill was mine, just like this was yours."

Lev and I may not ever be the hugging type with one another, but this kill was the sweetest damn gift he could've ever given me, and I won't forget it.

"I'll call some of our guys to come and take care of this," Roman says, already pulling out his phone to text someone.

"How's Vitya doing?" I ask them, knowing Natalya's been worried about him.

"He'll make it," Vitaly tells me. "He's damn lucky Sveta found him when she did." I can hear how proud he is of her when he says, "I can't

believe she demanded they do an immediate blood transfusion. Vein to fucking vein, Dominic.”

“She’s stubborn,” I tell him, not that he doesn’t already know that.

“She fucking hates the sight of blood,” he says with a laugh.

Val comes to stand beside us. “She’s never going to let him forget that she saved him. He’s going to wish she’d never found him.”

Vitaly laughs and nudges his son’s shoulder with his own. “I’m going to have to make sure she doesn’t convince him to let her break the rules because he owes her his life.”

“You think my sweet niece would do that?” Danil asks with a smile. “That doesn’t sound like Sveta at all.”

“Yeah, yeah, have your fun,” Vitaly tells us. “She is her father’s child.”

“She probably ate a bag of fruit snacks on the way to the hospital,” Matvey jokes.

“That’s my girl,” Vitaly says. Turning to me, he smiles. “It’s an excellent source of vitamin C.”

I hear Dario behind me, muttering in Italian about how fucking crazy this family is. He’s not wrong. Our families might both be involved in crime syndicates, but the Melnikovs are in a league all their own. The Alessi Mafia is one of rules and expectations, and the Melnikovs just do whatever the fuck they want. They started the Bratva on their own. They don’t have generations behind them, generations who have dictated how and why things are done the way they are. As the don, I run my family how I want, but I’m always walking a knife’s edge. Part of me wants to continue certain traditions, but the other part of me wants to just burn it all down and start from scratch. I’m hoping there’s a happy medium in there somewhere. I can’t help but think about the next generation. Our child will be born into the Alessi family, but his roots will run very deep into the Russian Bratva side of things.

“What are you thinking so hard about?” Vitaly asks me.

“I was just wondering if my son will one day be running an Italian Mafia or a Russian Bratva.”

“An Italian Mafia,” Dario says, his tone making it clear he doesn’t think it’s up for debate, but at the same time, Lev says, “A Russian Bratva,” his tone also leaving little room for debate.

“Why don’t we just wait and see?” Matvey suggests. “You never know. You may just have girls.”

“Also,” Vitaly adds, “that is very much a problem for another day. I try not to worry if I don’t have to. It prematurely ages you.”

“Yeah, you don’t want to have wrinkles and grey ball hair,” I tell him.

He barks out a laugh while Val says, “That’s gross, Dad.”

Vitaly just shrugs. “I’m just glad I have a nutsack to grow grey hairs on.” He looks over at Alexei’s severed genitals. “I’m guessing he’d give anything to have a few grey hairs.”

“True enough,” I agree.

Luka and Max have been quietly watching near their dads. They’ve been laughing with the rest of us, but they’re also taking in every detail of what’s been going on, no doubt memorizing everything for when they’re the ones in charge. Sasha’s eyes keep darting back to Alexei’s softly swaying body. There’s no horror behind his eyes; it’s more like fascination, and I wonder if Lev notices. My silent question is answered when Lev walks over and smacks his son on the back before leaning down to whisper something to him. Sasha nods, and after giving the body one last look, he goes to stand with his cousins.

Lev notices me watching and walks back over to me. “I’m handling it,” he says before I can even open my mouth.

I hold up a hand. “I didn’t say a word.”

“No, but I know you noticed it. Sveta is like her dad, and Sasha, for better or worse, is a lot like me. He doesn’t shy away from the dark parts of himself. If anything, he revels in them a bit too much, but he never lets the dark overtake the good. He still has a lot to learn, though.”

“Don’t we all?”

Lev smirks at me. “Well, now that you’re going to be his brother-in-law, you can help me out with him.”

Vitaly somehow manages to overhear us. “Now’s your chance to back out, Dominic.” He laughs at the matching scowls Lev and I are wearing. “Once you’re officially tied to this family, there’s no going back.”

“Dominic knows what it means to be tied to a family,” Dario reminds him.

“True, but not this one,” Vitaly counters.

“I’m not backing out of anything,” I tell them.

“And he’s already tied to us,” Lev reminds him. “I’d fucking kill him if he walked out on my pregnant daughter.”

“And I’d deserve it. I’m marrying Natalya. End of fucking story.”

Vitaly looks at me and grins. “Is there any way we can convince you to take the Melnikov name and drop Alessi? It’s the progressive thing to do.”

“Fuck that,” I say, feeling my cousins tense at the very idea of it. “Natalya is going to be an Alessi. I’m not fucking changing my mind on that.”

Lev groans, but he and his brothers don’t argue. They’d be doing the same thing, and we all know it.

“The cleanup crew is here,” Roman says right before four of their men walk in. I don’t recognize their faces, but the neck tats are a dead giveaway. Roman gives them orders in Russian, and they set to work. I’ve got to hand it to them, they don’t bat an eye at the cut-off dick and balls lying in a pool of blood. They just lower Alexei onto a tarp and throw his genitals on top before wrapping him up tightly and then carrying him out.

“I take it they’ve done this before,” Sandro mutters.

Matvey gives him a half smile. “A few times.”

With Alexei taken care of, I’m anxious to get back to my pregnant fiancée. I’d left her unsatisfied, and it’s time I went home and made it up to her. After telling the Melnikovs I’ll be in touch soon, I follow my cousins back out to the car. Dario must sense my impatience, because he breaks even more laws than usual and gets us back in what has to be a new personal record for him.

“See you later, boss,” Sandro says to me with a grin, knowing exactly what I’m about to do.

Dario looks over at me from the driver’s seat. “We’ll be at *La Dolce Vita* if you need us.”

“Sounds good. Thanks.”

I get out and let Sandro take my seat up front. My cousins have been invaluable since I brought them back to America with me, and as much as they love Italy, I can tell they’ve already made this place their home. Maybe Uncle Salvatore will feel better about things when he comes over for the wedding and sees for himself that this is where they need to be, that this city is our family’s future.

They leave as I go inside. The house is quiet, which isn’t all that unusual. Lucia is either cooking or sneaking a visit with Dr. Bianchi, Tony is most likely studying, because even though he’s no longer in med school, he’s still learning from the best doctor in the city and he needs to make

damn sure he knows how to do everything that's expected of him, and the rest of my men are off doing their jobs.

It won't stay this calm for long, so I don't waste any time. Hurrying up the stairs, all I can think about is my pregnant fiancée and how badly I want to see her again. She'd been tired when I'd left, so I let myself in without making a sound in case she's sleeping. I'd been right to be quiet. Walking over to the bed, I run my eyes over Natalya's sleeping form. She's propped herself up a bit with the pillows to ease the pain from her cracked ribs, and the blanket she's pulled up to her chin is hiding her from my view, and that's not at all what I want.

Being careful to not wake her, I slowly pull the blanket off, revealing her body one tantalizing inch at a time. I smile at the sight of her in nothing but my T-shirt and a pair of pink, lacy panties. I love seeing her in my clothes, almost as much as I love seeing her out of them.

She's in a deep sleep, and for the briefest of moments, I feel a slight twinge of guilt about not letting her sleep, but then she lets out a soft sigh and bends one of her legs, opening her thighs to me. I swear some part of her can sense that I'm here, and it's all the invitation I need. Pulling a knife from my pocket, I open it and very carefully slide it under the thin piece of fabric at her hip. The lace splits with a sort of terrifying ease, and I know it would slice just as easily through her skin if I wasn't being careful. I'm always careful with my *principessa*, though. The marks I've left on her body are nothing like the ones that cover it now. Alexei was a jackass who got off on causing her pain. I'm a monster who gets off on seeing her embrace a little bit of pain while in the throes of pleasure. We are not the same, and seeing his marks on her body makes me want to go and saw his dick off all over again.

Forcing him from my mind, I slide the tip of the blade along her other hip, cutting through the lace before putting my knife away. Her panties still cover her, the lace giving me a peek-a-boo glimpse of her smooth pussy. Positioning myself between her legs, I bring my nose to the thin scrap of fabric and breathe her in. Her scent drives me fucking crazy, and I fill my lungs with it, nuzzling her gently with my nose.

Sliding a finger under her panties, I pull the ruined lace down, exposing my fiancée's pretty pink pussy to me. I bite back a groan and hover my mouth over her, exhaling onto her hooded clit. She's not ready for me yet,

not plump with her arousal, clit pulling back from its hood as her wetness spills from her lips, but my god she fucking will be.

Not wanting to wake her just yet, I very softly lick along one side of her pussy. She lets out a heavy sigh, but she doesn't wake. I kiss and lick her soft lips, slowly making my way to her clit. Her body starts to respond, even as she continues to sleep. Her arousal coats my tongue, filling my mouth with the taste of her. I watch her mouth part on a sigh when I slowly start to kiss her clit. I cover her in kisses and licks, coaxing and guiding her body to the orgasm I want to give her.

Her clit swells for me as her pussy grows so wet she's dripping from her folds. She lets out a soft whimper, and I know she's close to coming and close to waking. Latching onto her, I grab her upper thighs and give her a good suck, pushing her over the edge.

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Chapter 18

Natalya

Mind-blowing pleasure races through my body, ripping me from my dream and straight into an orgasm. Disoriented, I open my eyes and the first thing I see is Dominic's dark eyes on mine, his bloodstained hands gripping my thighs, and his gorgeous mouth wrapped around my clit. He watches me come, groaning against my pussy at the sight of it. Instead of the pain that Alexei caused me, Dominic is giving me pure bliss to wash it all away.

"Dom," I moan, barely able to catch my breath because of the shallow breathing I'm forced to do. My hands reach down so I can run my fingers in his hair, and when he rims my clit with his tongue, I rock my hips harder, greedy for more. "Don't stop," I beg, desperate for more pleasure, for a release from the pain that's been a constant since Alexei put his filthy fucking hands on me.

Dominic watches me while giving me a slow lick, flicking his tongue at the last second like a smack to my clit. I tense in surprise, but when he blows a soft breath over my sensitive skin and flicks his tongue again, I fist his hair tighter and rock up for more.

"Someone's greedy," he whispers, ghosting his lips over my aching pussy in a teasing way that has me moaning his name again.

"I just want what you promised me," I tell him. "I believe you said something about not leaving me unsatisfied."

He grins and nuzzles his nose against my sex like he's drinking in the scent of me. "I wonder how many orgasms it would take to satisfy my *principessa*."

"Only one way to find out."

His deep, sexy laugh pulls a big smile from me, and when I let go of his hair so I can run my fingers over the dried blood that's covering his hands, he watches me with a raised brow, curious to see what I'll do.

"I take it you made it there in time and that I no longer need to worry about the Zolotov Bratva."

"I did, and you do not." He kisses my inner thigh while keeping his eyes locked on mine, slowly working his way back to my pussy. "I cut his dick off for you, sweetheart, and then I took his balls. He died slowly and in excruciating pain."

I try to muster up some guilt about what had to have been a truly horrific death, but I can't do it. I don't feel guilty about it. I just feel relieved that he's gone and I don't have to worry about him anymore.

Dragging my fingers along Dominic's chiseled jaw, I whisper, "Thank you."

"You don't need to thank me for protecting you, *principessa*. Anyone who touches you is a dead man."

I think about what he's said, and then ask the question that's been worrying at the back of my mind. "What happened to the guy who let Sveta and I into *La Dolce Vita*?"

He groans and runs his tongue up my slit. "You ask too many questions."

"I asked *one*," I point out, but he ignores me and slides his tongue into me, fucking me in slow strokes that force me to focus on my shallow breathing instead of wasting precious air on questions he'll just continue to ignore.

"No fair," I pant out, but he just laughs and grabs the backs of my thighs, spreading me wide so he can delve in even deeper.

"Come for me, *principessa*," he growls against my pussy. "I'm going to make your cunt into a beautiful mess. I want you sloppy and swollen, I want my face covered in your juices, and I want to feel your thighs shaking around my head."

All I can do is moan his name in response when he slides his tongue back into me while spreading me wide with his hands, exposing every inch of my pussy to him. He brings the pad of his thumb to my clit, rubbing me while he keeps stroking my inner walls with his tongue. The sensations are overwhelming and all at once, and when I whimper at the first hints of my orgasm, he rubs me harder, pushing me over the edge again.

I'm quickly learning that Dominic is skilled at everything he does. He reads my body perfectly, increasing and decreasing the pressure as needed, keeping me riding the climax until my whole body is shaking and I'm desperate to have him inside me, because as amazing as his mouth feels, I need *him*. I need to feel him spreading me wide and claiming the deepest parts of me.

"Dom," I whisper, one hand pulling his hair and the other tugging on the collar of the shirt that he needs to quickly rid himself of. "Please."

He gives my clit another lick and then pulls back to look at me, eyes darkening at the sight of my splayed-out pussy.

"God you look beautiful," he growls, using his thumbs to spread me wider. "My little *principessa*'s cunt is so fucking sloppy for me. Your pretty pink pussy is begging me to fuck it."

He leans closer, letting the heat of his breath ghost over my clit, and when it makes me clench, he groans, watching my inner lips move.

"That's exactly what I want you to do to my cock, sweetheart. I want to feel you gripping me, pulling me in deeper. Can you do that for me, *principessa*? Can you grip my dick and pull me into your sweet little pussy?"

"Yes," I whisper, tugging on his shirt even harder, desperate to do everything he just asked of me. "Get naked, Dominic."

He gives a soft laugh and nips at my clit. "If I didn't need to be inside you so badly, I'd punish you for how goddamn demanding you are." I feel his teeth softly graze my clit. "I told you I don't like to take orders."

"And I told you you'd get used to it."

I tug on his shirt hard enough to break a few buttons while he gives another deep laugh. "That's a bespoke Giorgio Armani shirt you just ripped, sweetheart."

"It's your fault. You're the one who's refusing to get naked. Stop being so stubborn. I need to feel your skin on mine."

He hears the truth in my words. He can tease me later all he wants, but right now I need him. Pulling back, he steps off the bed just long enough to rip his shirt off the rest of the way, not caring that he's popped off every button I'd left on there, and pulls his pants and boxer briefs off. My eyes run over the sculpted, olive skin, drinking in the sight of him. My legs are still splayed open, and before he gets back on the bed, he groans and fists his cock, slowly stroking himself while he watches me.

“You drive me fucking crazy.” He brings his body to mine, carefully pulling the T-shirt I’m wearing off, groaning when my breasts spill free. “I was going to wait until you’d had more time to heal, *principessa*, but you’re impossible to resist.” He cups one of my breasts, filling his hand with me as he kisses his way up my neck. “Every time I see you, I want to fuck you. Every goddamn time.”

“Good,” I whisper, moaning when he nips at the skin below my ear. “I hope you always feel that way.”

“I will.” He says it without a shred of doubt in his voice, making me instantly believe him. And if the conviction behind his words wasn’t enough, then the way he’s kissing me would be. One hand gently cups my face while he kisses me slowly and deeply, always mindful of my injuries and being careful to not cause me any more pain.

When he lowers his hips and drags the head of his cock along my soaking wet slit, I groan and open my mouth even more for him while wrapping my legs around his waist. His thick head presses harder against me, parting my lips but not sliding into me.

“Remember what I said, sweetheart.” His dark eyes bore into mine as he breaks our kiss and hovers his lips over mine. “I want to feel you clench around me. I want to feel your body begging me for my cock.”

His thumb lightly grazes my bruised cheek as he slides his thick head in. I groan and grip him tightly, smiling when I see his jaw tense and his eyes grow darker.

“Good fucking girl,” he growls. “Suck me in, sweetheart.”

I tighten my inner muscles, gripping him as hard as I can, feeling my body slowly suck him in as he works with me and gently thrusts his hips, sliding into me one thick inch at a time until I’ve taken him all the way in.

“Goddamn,” he groans against my lips and settles his body against mine so we’re locked together in stillness. “Mine, *principessa*.” He kisses me softly, prolonging this moment of the two of us joined together as deeply as we can be. “You are mine, sweetheart. Your pussy.” He rocks his hips so I can feel the movement deep inside me, and grins against my lips. “Your womb.” When I smile, he nips at my top lip. “Your mouth.” Grazing his fingers along the side of my breast, he trails them down my waist before sliding beneath my ass to cup one of my cheeks. “And as soon as you feel better, this tight, virgin ass is going to be mine too. I can’t stand knowing

there's a part of you that I haven't claimed. I'm a greedy man, *principessa*, and I want it all. Every single part of you."

My body tenses at the idea of him filling my ass, but then his mouth is on mine, and he's kissing me so thoroughly that it's impossible for me to think about anything other than how goddamn good this feels. He works his hips slowly, fucking me in a languid rhythm that lets me feel every goddamn stroke of his cock as he slides in and out of me.

"Dom," I moan, clutching him tighter and letting him chase the pain away.

"I've got you, sweetheart. You're getting it nice and slow tonight, but don't worry, I'm going to make you come so fucking hard."

He kisses me around the moan I give, angling his hips and keeping his hand on my ass so he can tilt me up just enough to have him hitting my clit with each deep thrust he's giving me. Pleasure builds between my legs, creating an ache that only intensifies with each passing second.

"I can feel you getting close, sweetheart," he murmurs against my lips. His hand finds my breast again, pinching my nipple just hard enough to sting, and just hard enough to stoke the flames he's already created inside me. He makes me burn for him. My body obeys him now, and when he growls at me to let go and come, I do. My ribs won't allow me to scream like I want, so I cling to him, panting my breaths to keep the pain at a minimum.

"I love you," he whispers, rocking into me, filling me as I clench down even harder around him. He kisses me through my orgasm, and right when I think it can't possibly last any longer, he moves his hand from my ass cheek. Pulling away from our kiss, he keeps his eyes on mine and brings a finger to my lips.

"Suck, sweetheart."

As soon as I part my lips, he slides his finger in, rolling it around my tongue and groaning when I close my mouth and give him a good suck.

"Good girl," he says, slowly pulling his finger free.

I watch him, not knowing what he has planned, but when he brings his hand back to my ass and then slides his wet finger along my crack before pressing firmly against my tight hole, I gasp as my body freezes.

"Just relax," he murmurs, kissing me again while he circles the pad of his finger over my skin, igniting all the nerve endings I never knew I had.

“Fuck,” I moan against his lips, feeling him smile before he thrusts into me again while teasing my ass. He finds a rhythm that leaves me shaking and dragging my nails down his back. I’m not sure what I’m begging for. I just know I need *more*. He fucks me faster, his breaths erratic as his body tenses beneath my greedy hands. He’s close, but he’s not letting go until I do. I try to hold out, not wanting this moment to ever end, but then he growls and nips at my top lip in warning.

“You think you can fight it, *principessa*? You think you can fight what my cock wants to give you?” He lets out a deep, masculine laugh. “Fucking try it, sweetheart,” he taunts, and then he slowly slides his finger into my ass while he rocks his hips, dragging the thick head of his cock along some hidden goldmine of nerve endings deep inside me, and I let go, because he’s made it impossible not to, and the smug laugh he gives makes it clear that he knew I would. There was never a chance of me fighting this, and as the pleasure washes over me, I can’t understand why I ever tried in the first place.

“Please,” I beg, feeling my pussy pulse around him in rhythm to the orgasm that’s thundering through me. He knows what I’m asking, what I want, and with one last deep thrust, he groans my name and lets go.

My arms and legs tighten around him as I suck his tongue between my lips, wanting him as close to me as possible. He grows even bigger inside me, a feeling that always surprises me, that makes me feel like I’m going to split apart in the most delicious way, and then his thick shaft is pulsing with each shot of his seed, and I grip him even tighter, desperate and greedy for every last drop.

“Jesus,” he pants against my lips when he’s finally empty. He kisses me while slowly sliding his finger out of my ass, both of us completely spent, our bodies relaxed and still humming with the aftershocks. “I love you so goddamn much.”

I kiss him again and then smile up at him when he lifts up onto his forearms, being careful to keep his weight off me while staying buried inside me.

“I love you too.” I run my fingers over his chest, tracing the intricate tattoos before grazing the bullet wound scar from the time my dad shot him. Dominic has several scars on his beautiful body, but this one always makes my chest feel tight. “I want to lock the door and never let you leave.”

He smiles and grabs my hand, kissing the palm of it. “Sounds perfect to me, *principessa*.”

Raising my head, I kiss the old scar, running my tongue over the rough skin as he cups the back of my head and presses his mouth to my ear. His deep voice and Italian accent send a shiver through me when he whispers, “Every single thing I’ve gone through, the pain, the loss, all of it, has been worth it because it brought me to you.”

I hold him tighter and kiss his cheek, savoring every second of this moment because as much as I’d love to lock him in here with me, we both know it’s never going to happen. I’ve just tied myself to a very dangerous man, and if I’m going to love him and be his wife and the mother of his children, then I need to go all in and love and accept him as he is. There’s no half-assing this.

“I’m glad it brought you to me,” I whisper against his skin. “I know your life is always going to be a dangerous one, but you’re worth it, Dominic. You’re worth everything.”

He kisses me again and then slowly slides out of me, frowning when I wince. “I shouldn’t have fucked you.” Worry hangs on every word out of his perfect mouth.

Cupping his face, I hold him and force him to look at me. “I don’t ever want to hear you say those words again.”

He lifts a brow at my tone and bites back the smile he wants to give.

“I’m serious. You can regret a lot of things, but not us, Dom, never us.”

“You’re right, *principessa*, and I could never regret anything with you. I just meant that I should’ve shown more restraint and let you rest for a few more days.” He turns his head and kisses my palm. “I don’t seem to have any willpower when it comes to you.”

“Good,” I tell him. “Hopefully that means I’ll always get my way.”

He laughs and kisses the tip of my nose. “You’ll always get what I think is best for you, sweetheart. That’s the best I can promise you.”

“I’ll take it.” I smile and add, “You’re old and set in your ways.”

He mutters something in Italian and shakes his head like he can’t believe what he’s just heard. “*Older*,” he corrects, “and wiser. I know what’s best for you, especially when it has to do with your safety.”

I smile at his stubbornness and give one of his perfect, round ass cheeks a sharp enough smack to have him raising a brow at me.

“You did not just fucking spank me.”

“It was a love pat. I also know what’s best for you, and I thought you could use it.”

“Jesus Christ,” he mutters. “My little fiancée is crazy.”

“Crazy about you.”

He smiles at my corny line and stands up, walking into the bathroom and giving me a perfect view of his ass with my reddening handprint on it. I can’t help but laugh.

“Yeah, laugh it up,” he hollers out at me. “Just wait until you’re all healed, sweetheart. I wonder how many handprints I can leave on your ass.”

I don’t have a smartass comeback for that one, and he’s still smiling about it when he comes back with a warm washcloth in his hands.

“Spread those pretty thighs for me, *principessa*.”

I do as he says, sighing when the warmth of the cloth hits my tender sex. “Thank you.”

He leans down and kisses me. “I will always make your pussy sore, sweetheart, but I promise I’ll always take care of you afterwards. Now be a good girl and rest while I go get you some food and some more ice for your ribs.”

I’m too tired to move, so I just nod and close my eyes, drifting off to sleep before he’s even come back. He wakes me and then insists on feeding me while I keep the bag of ice on my ribs. When I can’t keep my eyes open a second longer, he gets in bed next to me, wrapping me in his arms while I drift off to sleep again.

The next morning after he’s helped me shower and dress and iced my ribs again, he smiles and kisses me before saying, “I have a surprise for you.”

“Oh yeah?”

He laughs when I wiggle my brows at him because we both know I’m way too sore from last night to do anything right now.

“Not that kind of a surprise, sweetheart, but I do love your enthusiasm.”

I watch him walk to the door, and when he opens it, Svetlana comes running in. Ignoring the “Careful,” that Dominic yells at her, she jumps on the bed and then pulls me in for a surprisingly gentle hug.

“Don’t you ever scare me like that again,” she whispers into my hair.

“Don’t worry, I won’t. I don’t ever want to go through anything like that again.”

She pulls back and runs her eyes over my bruised face. "That bastard," she hisses, but then her eyes soften when she looks at my stomach. "I can't believe you're pregnant." She grabs my hand and gawks at the diamond on my finger. "And getting married."

With a laugh, she looks over to where Dominic is still hovering near the door, watching to make sure I'm okay.

"I bet you're not so mad about us sneaking into your club now, are you?"

He laughs and shakes his head. "I'm still pissed about you two putting yourselves in danger. I would've ended up with Natalya no matter what, so sneaking out wasn't necessary."

Svetlana huffs out a breath and waves off his comment. "Potayto, potahto."

"It's scary how much you're like your dad," he tells her. Then looking at me, he smiles and says, "I'll leave you two alone so you can visit." He walks over so he can kiss me, and then he can't help but fuss with my blankets and make sure everything is to his liking. "I'll have some food sent up."

"Thanks." I smile up at him as he gives me a wink and then starts to walk away.

As soon as the door is shut, Svetlana laughs. "Wow, that man is whipped."

"So am I," I tell her because it's the truth. I'm just as head over heels for him as he is for me. "How's everyone doing? My dad told me about Vitya. That was crazy, Sveta. You're like a kick-ass hero."

She sighs and lays down next to me, turning her head so we can still see each other. Her honey-brown eyes aren't as vibrant as they usually are. She's still the same best friend I remember, but there's a sadness hanging on her that wasn't there before.

"I was terrified," she admits in a whisper. "I woke up and went looking for you, and then I saw him lying there, and there was so much blood, Nat. I didn't know what to do, and all I could think was that you were lying somewhere nearby, bleeding out just like he was."

I grab her hand, squeezing it in mine when she looks like she's about to cry. Svetlana is not a crier. She cracks jokes, she deflects, she will do just about anything in order to not cry, so seeing her eyes turn glassy tells me everything I need to know.

“I’m so sorry,” I tell her. “When Andrik grabbed me, he told me if I fought him, then he would start killing everyone I love. I couldn’t risk it. I saw Vitya, but I thought he was already dead.”

“He looked it,” she says, giving me a half-smile. “As soon as I felt his pulse, I knew I had to try and save him, even if he was kind of a big, silent dick to us.”

I let out a soft laugh and keep squeezing her hand as she continues.

“Thank god, Pyotr was there. The guy is like a walking encyclopedia of everyone’s blood type and health history. We were a match, so I insisted he start a transfusion.”

She laughs and shakes her head. “I honestly didn’t even know that shit was possible. I stayed up late with Val one night, and he was watching some war movie where they did a transfusion on the battlefield. Pyotr tried to talk me out of it, tried to tell me it wouldn’t do any good, that Vitya was too far gone, but I told him he’d better get that damn needle in my vein or I was going to start poking around on my own. I guess he knew how pissed my dad would be if I returned with a mutilated arm, so he finally gave in and connected us.”

“How’s Vitya doing?”

She huffs out a breath and rolls her eyes. “I went to visit him in the hospital, you know, *after saving his life*, and all he did was grunt at me. Was it a *thank you for saving my life* grunt or a *get the hell out of my room* grunt? Who the hell knows? He’s infuriating.”

I smile because men don’t frustrate Svetlana. She admires their beauty, wishes she could maybe date a few of them, but no one has ever caught her attention and weighed on her mind.

“Stop smiling,” she grumbles. “Tell me exactly how Uncle Lev took the news of you being knocked up and engaged.”

I’m saved from having to answer when there’s a soft knock at the door. When I holler that it’s okay to come in, one of the maids that I’ve only briefly met, comes in with a smile and leaves a huge tray of food on the bed for us. We thank her and as soon as she shuts the door, we dig into the brunch Lucia’s prepared for us.

“Start talking,” Svetlana reminds me before taking a big bite from the filled doughnut that Dominic taught me is called a *bombolone*.

While we eat our fill and then some, I tell Svetlana every single detail of everything that happened. By the time I’m done, I’m so stuffed I can barely

move, and I'm ready for my afternoon nap. When I start to yawn, she shoves her empty plate aside and stretches out on the bed, groaning at how full she is.

"I need to get going before Dominic comes up and kicks my ass out. He made me promise a million things before he'd even let me up here, and one of them was that I'd get my butt moving if I saw you yawn. He also thought two visitors would be overwhelming." She stops to playfully roll her eyes. "So everyone else will be visiting on a rotating schedule that I'm sure Dominic will be making and texting to everyone."

"He's just worried," I say with a laugh.

"I know. It's kind of cute, and I'll be sure to tease him about it for the rest of our lives."

"You're going to be in my wedding, right? I need you up there with Yelena."

"Of course." Svetlana laughs. "God, Mia is going to kill you."

"There's no way she can't be my maid of honor, so she's going to just have to grit her teeth and wear a damn dress for one afternoon."

"I'm so glad I'll be there to witness it. Please tell me you've chosen pink as the color for your bridesmaid dresses."

"Do you honestly think I could ever pick anything else?"

Svetlana laughs and claps her hands. "I'm going to take so many pictures."

"She will truly love that."

We both laugh at how uncomfortable my sister is going to be. We both love her to pieces, so it's not out of meanness, and I'm sure she'll get back at me when she gets married and forces me to wear black cargo pants and combat boots or whatever the hell else she decides on for her wedding. I'll do it with a smile on my face, just like I know she'll wear whatever I pick out for mine. My little sister is a lot of things, but she'd never ruin my special day by throwing a tantrum. She's just not that kind of person.

Dominic must have some sort of sixth sense about me, because as soon as Svetlana and I hug and she stands up to leave, he's walking in to check on us.

"Please don't tell me you have hidden cameras in here," she teases him. "I mean, it's kind of kinky, but also really fucking creepy."

"I don't have hidden cameras in our bedroom, Sveta. I just know my fiancée must be getting tired, and it's time for me to ice her ribs again."

Svetlana laughs but pulls him in for a hug that I can tell surprises him. He smiles at me over her shoulder and returns her hug.

“Congratulations on the baby and the wedding. I knew you were a goner the second I saw you looking like you were going to have an aneurysm when you saw her on the dance floor.”

“Don’t remind me,” he groans. “I wanted to kill that little fucker who groped her.”

“I did break his nose,” I remind them.

“That you did, *principessa*. Sexiest goddamn thing I’ve ever seen.”

Svetlana laughs and gives me a wave before walking out. “Call me!”

“I will,” I promise her, sighing when Dominic lifts up the bag of ice he’s brought with him. “I’m tired of being sore.”

He moves the tray to the dresser and then walks over to me.

“Can we at least do it in the sunroom?”

He smiles at my request and leans down to pick me up, carrying me into the sunroom that he’s been fixing up for me. There are a few more comfy chairs, two bookshelves, and a hammock chair. When I point to it, he lets out a soft laugh. It’s big enough for both of us, but he still keeps me on his lap as he sits back into it. The sun streams in from all the windows, and it’s quickly become my favorite room in the house. When we’re situated, he gently presses the ice to my cracked ribs. Brushing back my hair, he kisses my forehead.

“Much better,” I sigh when he starts to gently rock us.

“I’m sorry you’re still so sore, baby. We’re going to get you all fixed up, and then we’re getting married, and then I’m going to enjoy watching my wife slowly grow bigger with our baby.”

I can’t help but smile at how damn happy he sounds. Resting my head against his chest, I snuggle into him, more than ready to become his wife.

* * *

One Month Later

“You look so beautiful.”

I look over at my mom and smile. We’ve both been crying all morning, but ever since having my makeup finished, I’ve been trying like hell to keep

my eyes dry. I know it's a losing battle, but I'm still trying. We've been planning this wedding for a month, and even though Dominic hired a wedding planner so I wouldn't have to worry about anything, it's still been a crazy time. It doesn't help that my morning sickness kicked in a few days ago. I've been spending every morning with my head in the toilet, an event that Dominic insists on being present for so he can hold my hair and rub my back, and then the rest of our days have been spent visiting with his aunt and uncle, who recently flew in from Italy for the occasion. A bunch of his distant relatives also decided to come over, and, as a sign of respect, all his men will be here too so they can witness their boss getting married.

I push aside all thoughts of how many sets of eyes are going to be on me today and turn my focus back to my reflection in the large mirror in front of me. Dominic's Aunt Maria got in touch with me shortly after he told them about our engagement and asked me to send her my measurements. The pregnancy isn't showing yet, but we all know that's not going to last much longer. She'd worked whatever kind of Italian magic she has, which probably had a lot more to do with throwing the Alessi name around instead of wands and potions, and surprised me with a handmade Valentino wedding dress. I'd nearly fainted when I'd seen it and scared Dominic half to death, but in my defense, it is the most gorgeous dress I've ever seen.

The delicate lace and high neck make it look both feminine and modest, but even though it's modest, there's nothing frumpy about it. It hugs me like a second skin until it fans out gently around my legs. Dominic loves knowing that he's the only one who's ever seen me naked, so while the lace gives a muted view of the cleavage that's definitely grown during my pregnancy, it's still hiding me from full view.

"You just look so beautiful," my mom says again, wiping at her eyes.

I squeeze her hand and smile. "So do you, Mom. You look amazing in that dress."

She'd kept with my pink theme and chosen a dress that's a few shades lighter than the bridesmaid dresses I'd picked out. It's in the same style too, an apron neckline with spaghetti straps that crisscross all along the open back. The soft fabric billows out the perfect amount, falling right at their ankles to show off the pink heels they'll all be wearing. I'm also wearing my pink heels, the ones that Dominic is obsessed with, but mine are hidden

beneath my white dress. I plan on flashing him later on during the reception.

“I’m so happy for you.” My mom reaches up to fix the delicate veil that falls along the back of my hair. She laughs at the tears that start to fall again. “Promise me you won’t move to Italy. I can’t handle having you that far away, especially once our grandbaby gets here.”

“I promise I won’t. Dominic wants to stay here, and so do I. I can’t imagine being separated from you all.”

Dominic’s aunt and uncle would like nothing more than for us to move to Italy, but neither one of us wants that. Our future is here, and we both know it. I give my mom another hug, and then she kisses my cheek and tells me she loves me.

“I’d better go check on things and make sure Dominic is doing okay. I’ve never seen him look so nervous before.” She laughs and squeezes my hand one last time. “I still can’t believe I’m younger than my son-in-law. We always thought Mia would be the one to go and do something crazy, but you’ve one-upped her this time, kiddo.”

I smile at my mom’s teasing. “I’m sure that won’t last for long.”

“Oh, don’t I know it,” she says, giving me a wink. “Let’s enjoy it for the day, though. She can do something crazy tomorrow. Today’s your day, baby. I love you.”

“I love you too, Mom.”

I bite my lip to keep from crying and watch her walk out the door. Turning back to the mirror, I make sure everything is in place, when I hear a soft knock.

“Come in,” I say, expecting Svetlana, but it’s my dad who walks through the door. The piercings are obvious, and his hair is still a tad too long, but most of his tattoos are hidden by the tux today, and if I didn’t know any better, I’d say he looked nervous.

“Princess,” he whispers, smiling at the sight of me in my dress. He quickly closes the distance and wraps me in a hug that’s not near as delicate as the one Mom gave me. “Just say the word, and I’ll get you out of here, honey. We can sneak out the back. I’ve already mapped out an escape route. No one will be the wiser.”

I laugh because I know he’s joking...well, mostly joking.

“I don’t want to run away, Dad. I want to marry him.”

He sighs and kisses the top of my head. "I know you do. I just thought I'd offer it in case you didn't know it was an option."

Pulling back, he looks at me, and the fatherly love in his eyes has mine tearing up.

"I can't believe you're getting married, princess. You were supposed to wait until you were in your late twenties at the earliest. I'm not ready to say goodbye to you yet."

"Dad, this is not goodbye. I'm not going anywhere."

He raises a pierced brow at me. "He's taking you to Italy."

"For our honeymoon," I say with a laugh, "and we're coming back in two weeks."

"You better or your uncles and I will be on the next flight out."

"I'm not so sure Italy is ready for the Melnikov brothers."

My dad laughs. "Probably not. His uncle is having a hard enough time being civil to us. If it wasn't for his wife, I think he would've already pulled a gun out."

I shake my head at him and pat his chest. "He just remembers that you shot his nephew."

"Yeah, well he deserved it. Dominic's dad never warmed up to us either, so I guess it's a family thing."

"Well, they seem to love me," I tease, pulling a smile from him.

"How on earth could they not? You're perfect, always have been." He cups my hand in his, and I watch his lip ring move with the big smile he's giving me. "I'll never forget holding you for the first time. You were so tiny." He laughs at the memory. "I was so afraid I was going to squeeze you too tightly or accidentally drop you, but you just looked up at me with your big, blue eyes and wrapped your tiny hand around my finger. You weren't worried at all. You trusted me completely, and I love you just as much now as I did then. Nothing will ever change that, not even marrying a goddamn Italian."

I give him a wobbly smile and wrap my arms around him in a big hug. "I love you, Dad, and I promise you will never lose me. I'm not going anywhere. We'll be in different houses, but I'm going to visit so often that you'll hardly notice it."

"You better, princess."

"Can we come in?"

We both turn to see my Uncle Vitaly's head peeking around the door. "I might have taken a few photos of that sweet moment," he says, holding up his phone.

"Dad, you're terrible," Svetlana says, scooting around him and coming into the room, and then once she's through, it's only a matter of seconds before my entire family is barging in with big grins on their faces and my mom is giving me a half-hearted *I'm sorry* look as she walks over to stand next to my dad. He smiles down at her and pulls her tightly against him.

"They wanted to say hi," she tells me with a laugh.

I look at my aunts and uncles and cousins and then turn to Svetlana. She just shakes her head and mutters, "This is like our dance recital all over again. We really can't take them anywhere."

"Our family was born to stand out, Sveta," Uncle Vitaly says before pulling me into a hug. "Besides, what are they going to do? It's not like they can get mad at the bride."

Uncle Danil hugs me after Aunt Simona and says, "You should have seen him, Nat. He just told the waiters to start handing out wine. You might be saying your vows in front of a bunch of intoxicated people."

"Oh, come on," Uncle Vitaly jokes. "Like they weren't already a little drunk."

"He's impossible to keep in line," Uncle Matvey says when he hugs me. "We just gave up and stopped trying years ago."

"You look beautiful," Aunt Alina whispers in my ear. "Dominic's a good man, and I'm so happy for you two."

"Thanks, Aunt Alina." I don't even bother fighting the tears as I'm passed around to everyone. My cousins are all in tuxes, too, and Yelena and Svetlana look beautiful in their bridesmaid's dresses. When I get to my brother, I hug him tightly, knowing I'm going to miss the hell out of him.

"Don't cry, sis. I'm going to come and visit you all the time. Dominic's house is awesome, and Dario's been teaching me some new combat moves."

"He has?"

Sasha gives me his devilish grin. "Dominic told me Dario is really good with close contact knife fighting, so I asked if he'd teach me."

My brother is beaming as he tells me.

"I can't believe Mom and Dad agreed."

He shrugs. "It's a good skill to learn. Plus, I need to spend time with my brother-in-law and his men. Family bonding and shit."

I laugh and shake my head. "Just be careful, little brother."

"Of course, sis."

When I finally get to Mia, I pull my sister into a tight hug, and even though she's trying like hell to not show how uncomfortable she is wearing a pink dress, I can still see signs of her discomfort. I'd compromised and let her wear black nail polish and her black Converse All Stars because I like seeing her personality shine through a bit, and she looks cute as hell in them.

"I promise you can change after we're all done with the photos."

She pulls back and gives me a half smile. "No, it's all right. I don't mind it as much since you didn't make me wear the heels." Her smile grows when she says, "Plus, Dad may have said he'll think about a third ear piercing because of my willingness to wear a dress."

I look over at our dad, who's only a few feet away. He shrugs his broad shoulders and smiles. "What? The last time I saw little witch in a dress was when she was a toddler. The moment lasted about two seconds and then she ripped it off and ran around the house naked."

"I stand by that decision," Mia says with a smile.

My dad laughs and pulls us both in for a hug. "Neither one of you better ever change. You're both perfect, and I love you."

"Love you too, Dad," we both say, hugging him back.

"I think the Italians are getting restless," my Uncle Roman says, looking down the hall and out the large window that faces the backyard. We decided to have the wedding at home since it's so much easier to secure, and the place has been bustling for days. Dominic hired a catering team so Lucia could just sit back and enjoy the wedding, and as hectic as the last few weeks have been, it's also been amazing.

"Do I look okay?" I ask, running a hand down my dress, thankful that my ribs no longer hurt and my face has fully healed.

"You look beautiful," my dad says.

"Stunning," Svetlana adds while my sister nods her head in agreement.

"All right, let's go take our seats like civilized people," Uncle Danil suggests, giving me a wink. "Show them that Russians do know how to behave."

“Since when?” Uncle Vitaly asks with a laugh. Aunt Katya smiles at me while she drags her husband from the room. The rest slowly follow, and soon it’s just my dad and me, waiting for our cue.

Before we walk out, he looks down at me and smiles. “Someone wanted to say hi before I walk you out there.”

Before I can ask him who it is, Grigori’s standing in the doorway. He looks like he’s lost a few pounds and he’s using crutches, but he’s alive and smiling, and I quickly close the distance so I can give him a hug.

“Thank you so much,” I whisper, being careful to not hug him too tightly while he’s still healing. “I’m so sorry, Grigori.”

“Nothing to be sorry about, Natalya. I’m just glad you’re safe,” he tells me. Pulling back, he looks at me in my dress and smiles. “You look beautiful.”

“Thanks. How are you feeling? Are you recovering okay?”

He laughs at my questions. “I’m fine. Stop worrying about me. I spend my days fishing and spending time with my wife.” He gives me another smile. “I think retirement suits me, and she’s thrilled to not have to worry about me all the time anymore.”

I squeeze his hand, happy that he and his wife are happy.

“Well, I better get back out there.” He nods at my dad and then gives me one last smile before leaving.

I turn back to my dad. “Thanks for sneaking him in. I’ve been worrying about him.”

“I know, and neither one of us wanted you to keep doing it. He’s happy, and he would’ve had to stop watching over you anyway since Dominic insists on having his own bodyguards around you now.”

I smile at his tone. “I love you, Dad.”

“I love you, princess,” he says, squeezing my hand and placing it on his arm so he can escort me down the aisle.

He turns to me and kisses my cheek.

“I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but let’s go get you married, honey.”

I smile up at him and squeeze his arm, because even though I’m about to get married and be a mom, I still desperately need my dad right now. Sensing my nerves, he keeps his hand over mine, letting me know without saying a word that he will always be there to support me, no matter what.

I take a deep, shaky breath, and when I hear the music start up, I follow my dad's lead and step outside with him. It's because of his unwavering love and support that I feel strong enough to embrace my future and join my life to Dominic's. My family has given me the foundation I need, and marrying into the Alessi family doesn't mean I'll be leaving mine behind. I'll always be a Melnikov. It's just that now I'll also be an Alessi.

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Chapter 19

Dominic

I've never been so nervous in my life. The first time I saw a man die, I was twelve years old. The first time I was pulling the trigger, I was fourteen. Neither of those moments even come close to this one. It's not that I'm scared of joining my life to Natalya's. It's more that I'm terrified she's going to come to her senses and realize she can do so much better than me.

I stand next to the priest, the one my uncle insisted we fly in because he's performed every ceremony for the Alessi family that I can remember, with a cold sweat breaking out beneath my tux as I watch the bridesmaids and groomsmen make their way down the aisle. Hundreds of people are in attendance, and the yard looks like it's a fairytale wedding with all the pink roses I ordered, but I barely pay attention to anything. All my focus is on trying to get a glimpse of my bride-to-be.

When the music changes and I see Lev step out with Natalya on his arm, my heart starts to race and all the air leaves my body on a heavy sigh.

"You all right, boss?" Dario asks from behind me while Sandro gives a soft laugh that I ignore.

I nod and keep my eyes locked on the woman I love. She's beautiful, absolutely stunning in her white, lacy dress. The bouquet of pink and white roses are held in one hand while her other one is gripping her dad's arm like it's her lifeline. Her blue eyes look glassy when I meet them, and she gives me the sweetest smile when they're both standing in front of me. With what must be taking all of Lev's willpower, he takes her hand and kisses it before placing it in mine. He kisses her cheek and then pulls me in for a quick hug. To everyone else, it looks like a sweet moment between father and son-in-

law, but I know better, so I'm not at all surprised when he takes the opportunity to whisper in my ear, "If you hurt her, I will fucking kill you."

I smile and hug him back. "I'll help you load the gun myself," I tell him.

He nods and smacks my back before giving his daughter one last look and then going to sit beside a beaming Jolene.

I'm sure the ceremony is a beautiful one, but I'll be damned if I can remember any of it. What I can remember is every detail of Natalya's face and exactly how she sounded when she said, "I do" and became my wife.

When I'm finally told I can kiss my bride, I cup her face and smile down at her. I should probably do a chaste kiss, but fuck that. She's my wife, and I can kiss her any damn way I want. I don't have to lower down as much as I usually do, so I know she's wearing heels under that dress, and when I press my lips to hers, she lets out a soft moan. I give her a soft flick with my tongue, asking for permission for more, because as much as I want to kiss her deeply, I don't want to push it further than she wants to go. She immediately opens for me, letting me in as someone whistles loudly and a few others cheer. I don't have to open my eyes to know it's not my family doing it.

"Jesus Christ," I hear Lev groan before I finally pull back with a laugh. His daughter is blushing to the roots of her hair, lips wet and swollen, so angelic in her white dress, but she's not fooling me. I know my *principessa*, and there's no way in hell her panties aren't soaked right now.

I give her a wink and pull her close as we turn to face the crowd of smiling faces. Everyone cheers as we walk back down the aisle, and I can't stop smiling. I had no idea your face could actually ache from smiling too much, but my wife is constantly teaching me new things. She's opened up an entirely new world to me and taken my dreary life and made it fucking shine.

"That was so beautiful," Svetlana says, turning around to pull Natalya into another hug. Yelena quickly joins them, and I smile at them while one of the photographers I hired snaps a ton of photos. I'd hired three because I want to document every second of this day. I want our house filled with photos, and I never want to forget how beautiful my pregnant bride looked on the day I married her.

Soon we're surrounded by her rowdy family as the other guests slowly make their way to the large, white tent that's set up. The caterers have been

busy all day, and the tables are already laid out with lit candles and more flowers. Fairy lights decorate the tent, and with the sun setting, the place looks downright magical.

“It’s so beautiful,” Natalya tells me once her family finally lets her go.

“You’re what’s beautiful, *principessa*.”

She smiles up at me and rests her hands on my chest. “I can’t believe we’re married.”

I smile and pick her up, while she throws her arms around my shoulders and laughs at the cheers coming from the crowd.

“I think you’re supposed to carry me over the threshold, not carry me to the reception tent.”

I kiss her and hold her tighter. “I think you’re my wife now, and I can carry you any damn place I want.”

“You’re going to be unbearably bossy now, aren’t you?”

I give her a wink before walking her to the tent. “*Principessa*, you have no idea.”

She laughs and doesn’t argue when I carry her to her seat or when I scoot it closer so our legs are touching, and not even when she finishes supper and I put her on my lap. My little wife is learning.

After cutting the cake and mingling with the crowd, I grab a glass of wine and go to stand by my uncle, watching Natalya get whisked away to the dance floor by Svetlana and Yelena. She turns back to give me a smile and wave before joining the crowd and shaking her sweet ass to the beat of the music.

“You did good, Dominic,” Uncle Salvatore says, eyeing my wife with a drink in hand. “She’s not Italian,” he adds with a small shrug, “but she’s a good match for you.”

“She is,” I agree. “Much better than all the women you’ve tried to throw at me over the years.”

“All the women you swore were too young? Yes, nephew, you’ve clearly proven me wrong. Need I remind you that your little wife can’t even legally drink in her own country?”

I laugh and shake my head. “You do not, no.”

My uncle laughs when he sees Dario and Sandro being pulled into the crowd of dancing bodies by Jolene, Simona, and Katya. Alina and Emily are already dancing, and when I look around, I see all their husbands watching them.

“If you insist on keeping my sons out here, at least make sure they get married at some point. I’d like to see some grandkids before I die.”

“My cousins take orders without question when it comes to the family business, Uncle, but that doesn’t mean I can snap my fingers and get them to walk down the aisle.”

He raises a bushy brow at me. “You could actually order it. How do you think your aunt and I ended up together? Don’t get me wrong, I love the woman and we make a good team, but I didn’t pick her. Your grandfather wanted her family’s resources.” He shrugs his broad shoulders, one arthritic hand still gripping the wine glass. “It turned out well, though, and we secured her family’s commercial fishing business, which has helped us ship product all over the world, Dominic.”

I nod because it’s not the first time I’ve heard this, but I’m still not about to force my cousins into marriage to secure a business deal. I also don’t mention that my uncle has been unfaithful throughout the majority of his marriage. I’m glad my uncle and aunt have found a way to make that work, but that’s not how I do things.

“Anyway,” my uncle continues when it’s obvious I’m not going to start arranging marriages anytime soon, “I’m happy that you’re happy.” After a few seconds, he adds, “Isabella would have loved seeing you like this.”

The thought of my sister still makes my chest ache, but the pain is nothing compared to what it once was. Natalya has healed me in more ways than one. I’ll always miss my sister, but I’m able to smile at the memories of her now. I’m able to focus on the good instead of holding on to all the anger.

“She would have,” I agree, wishing like hell she could be here to see it. I think she would’ve loved my wife.

My uncle squeezes my shoulder and raises his glass in a silent toast to my sister. I do the same as we watch the guests celebrate my wedding.

Taking another drink, I smile when Natalya meets my eyes and gives me a wink before lifting her dress up just enough to tease me with a quick glimpse of the heels she’s wearing. My jaw clenches when I see the pink heels with the straps tied around her ankles.

“I can feel you thinking sexual thoughts about my daughter.”

I turn my head to meet Lev’s grim expression. He looks back at his daughter, giving her a big smile while raising his glass of vodka before turning back to me, frown already in place.

Matvey laughs and takes a step closer. "He's only thinking what we all thought on our wedding day."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Lev says.

My uncle makes a soft grunting noise and then downs the last of his wine. "I'll see you later, Dominic."

Vitaly walks over with a big grin on his face, watching my uncle disappear into the crowd. "Well, he's warmed up to us about as much as his brother did."

"He loves Natalya, though," I tell them, "so at least there's that."

"Of course he does." Lev looks offended at the very idea of someone not liking his daughter. "How could he not?"

"My thoughts exactly," I tell him.

It earns me the smallest of half smiles.

Vitaly pulls out his phone and holds it up. "I want a photo of the two of you."

"Jesus," Lev groans.

"Oh come on, just one of the two of you." When neither one of us budes, he waves his hand at Roman and yells something in Russian. Roman laughs and walks off, returning a few seconds later with one of the photographers. Lev and I both turn to glare at a laughing Vitaly.

"Oops, now you kind of have to. It'll cause a big scene if you don't, and I know neither one of you wants to ruin our sweet Natalya's day."

"You are such a fucker," Lev mutters.

The photographer walks over while Danil joins his brothers so everyone can get in on this moment. Vitaly stands next to the woman with the camera, arms crossed and one hand on his chin like he's deep in thought. Then he holds his hands up to make a box and closes one eye, giving off the impression that he's viewing this all from an artistic standpoint.

"I think they should be embracing." He turns to look at her. "What do you think? Kind of like you're capturing a bonding moment between Lev and his son-in-law."

She nods and holds her camera up. "That could be really good."

Vitaly beams at us while Lev and I both groan. Taking a side step so we're almost touching, Lev puts his arm around my shoulders.

"Let's just get this over with before he tries to get us to hug chest to chest."

I laugh at Lev's grumpy voice and return the side hug. The woman snaps a bunch of photos while Vitaly laughs and nudges Matvey.

"Is it just me, or are you seeing Christmas card potential here?"

Matvey laughs and shakes his head at Vitaly. "Don't forget that you're going to be father of the bride one day."

That sobers Vitaly up. "Jesus, she's a wild thing, too. I can sense it. Sveta's like a lioness just waiting for her cage to be opened so she can go terrorize the world. I don't even want to think about who she's going to bring home."

He finishes his drink and waves down one of the passing waiters so he can grab another one.

"That cage needs to stay locked for at least another decade," he says, downing his newest drink in record time.

Lev laughs and drops his hand when the photographer finally lowers her camera. "Good luck with that. I didn't let Natalya out of any damn cage and look what she dragged home," he says, jerking his head in my direction in case there's any confusion about who he's talking about.

Vitaly pales a bit at that, which makes me laugh, and then I finish my drink and hand the empty glass to Lev.

"I'm going to go dance with my bride."

Lev looks over at the dance floor, smiling when he sees Jolene waving him over with a big smile on her face. She's obviously had a few and is feeling no pain. His whole face changes when he looks at her. We're not so different after all. We're both just too stubborn to admit it.

Matvey laughs when Alina starts yelling his name and waving him over.

"Our wives are drunk," Vitaly says, shaking his head in mock disappointment. "We really can't take them anywhere."

"Such an embarrassment," Roman agrees, laughing when Emily attempts some sort of move with Simona and they both nearly trip and fall on their asses.

"Jesus," Danil says, laughing so hard he barely gets the word out. "It's a testament to how much I love that woman that I still think she's sexy as hell when she does shit like that."

"I think we need to go show them how it's done," Vitaly says, pointing at his wife and yelling something at her in Russian. She laughs and lets out a surprisingly loud catcall while shaking her ass and waving for him to join her. He laughs and takes off running.

This is my new family, I think to myself, watching the crazy Russians take over the dance floor, not giving the slightest shit that their kids are laughing and that everyone else is staring. They're having fun, though, and it's about damn time we had some of that around here.

Natalya is waiting for me, and as soon as I'm close enough, I pull her into my arms and lean down to kiss her.

"Thanks for wearing the heels, *principessa*."

She smiles and sways in my arms while I slowly guide her to the outskirts of the dance floor. Everyone smiles as we pass by. Several of my men are dancing, but there's also a lot of Bratva members too. I nod to Timofey, one of the Melnikovs' top men, and his wife Mila as I dance us through the crowd. We pass Lucia and Dr. Bianchi, neither one of them bothering to hide their feelings tonight as they dance way closer together than any friends ever would. They both give us a couple of wine-happy smiles when we pass by and hit the edge of the makeshift dance floor.

"In about three minutes I'm going to fuck you in them, sweetheart."

"Huh?"

She looks up at me, and I laugh at her surprised look before I scoop her into my arms.

"But I haven't thrown my bouquet!"

Mia hears her and tosses her the flowers she'd set down.

"Better throw it fast," I warn her.

All the single ladies quickly form a group behind her, and when I turn us so she can't see them, she throws it back while the women scream and lunge for it.

"No!" I hear Vitaly yell, and I'm already laughing before I've even turned around. "Drop it, Sveta." He looks over at us. "Do-over!"

I laugh and shake my head while Svetlana holds the bouquet up, giving a huge, triumphant grin. I'm still laughing when I notice Vitya standing in the shadows by the tent, watching her every move. He's still healing and not fully back on duty, but Lev had told me that he'll be assigned to Sveta from now on. I get why Natalya had said he was like a robot. The man doesn't show many human emotions. I'm sure the two of them will have a lot of fun sorting things out. I'm still smiling at the thought when I turn back around to carry my bride off.

"Couldn't we have just snuck off?"

I look down and smile at her embarrassed face when everyone starts hollering and catcalling behind us.

“I tried to, but you insisted on throwing your bouquet.” When she blushes even deeper, I lean down and kiss her. “Sweetheart, you’re pregnant. Your dad already knows we’re fucking.”

“Oh my god,” she groans. “Don’t ever say those words to me again.”

I feel the heat of her blushing cheek beneath my lips. “Whatever you say, *principessa*. We’ll pretend that everyone thinks we’re just going inside to check on your dress or fix your makeup.”

“Much better,” she whispers. “That’s probably exactly what they’re all thinking.”

“Of course. Don’t forget I was at your Uncle Matvey’s wedding. When I saw them sneak off, I’m sure it was just to freshen up her makeup too.”

“Most definitely,” she agrees with a laugh.

The waiters are still bustling around and refilling their trays, but they all step aside when they see me carrying my bride. I carry Natalya to our bedroom. We’ll be spending the night here and then leaving for Italy tomorrow afternoon. My relatives are staying for another few days, but Dario and Sandro can take care of all that. I’m more than happy to hand the reins over and take my first vacation ever. My work is no longer my life. The woman who’s carrying my child is.

Kicking the door shut, I carry her over to the bed and set her down beside it.

“You make a beautiful bride, *principessa*.”

“You make a handsome groom, Dominic.”

I smile at the way she’s eyeing me. Her pregnancy is still in the very early stage, but I’ve already noticed a few changes. Her sexual appetite is even more ravenous than usual, which is saying something, and her breasts are sensitive and slightly fuller. Her stomach hasn’t gotten any bigger, but just the thought of her having a cute, rounded pregnant belly makes me so fucking hard I can barely think.

Her hands reach up to slide my tux jacket off, and when she starts working on the buttons of my white dress shirt, I let out a soft laugh.

“Not such a bad idea I had, after all, was it?”

“Maybe not,” she admits. “You do look damn sexy in this tux, and seeing you in it has been driving me crazy.”

I grip her waist and pull her body tight against mine. "I knew you were wet under that angelic dress."

"Maybe just a little."

"A little?" I raise a brow at her. "We'll see if it's just a little in a few minutes. I'm guessing when I slide my hand under your dress and cup your sweet pussy, you'll be soaking wet for me."

"Maybe," she whispers, working her fingers faster and then roughly yanking my shirt off so I'm bare-chested in front of her. She runs her hands over me, just as mesmerized by my tattoos as the first time she saw them. She's also fascinated by the trail of dark hair that runs from my navel to my cock. If her fingers aren't on it, then it's her mouth or her pussy.

Insatiable, like I said.

When she starts to undo my pants, I hiss out a breath at how damn eager she is. Running a finger along the sheer, feminine lace that covers her chest, I let out a soft groan.

"I really love this dress on you." My fingers slide lower, hitting the cleavage that's hidden enough so I didn't turn into a protective beast during our wedding and put my jacket on her, but low enough to tease and drive me crazy.

"But now I want to see my wife in nothing but those sexy heels and whatever else you're hiding under this dress."

Her pouty mouth curves up in a smile as she unzips my pants and tugs them down. I kick off my shoes and step out of them. She steps back as I lose my socks and then finally the black boxer briefs I'm wearing. When I'm naked, she rakes her eyes over me, not making the slightest attempt to hide how much she's eye-fucking me. My cock bobs at her obvious desire, and when she licks that top lip of hers, I groan and feel the pre-cum dripping down my shaft.

She steps closer and then turns around, pushing her hair to the side. "Can you unzip me?"

"I'm going to do a hell of a lot more than that, *principessa*."

Leaning down, I nip at her neck and slowly pull the zipper down. As soon as it's far enough, she pulls back and turns around to face me. With her eyes on mine, she very slowly tugs on the sleeves of her dress, letting it fall from her body inch by tantalizing inch until I see the way her full tits are spilling out of the lacy, strapless bra she's wearing. Instead of the traditional white, she's opted on pale pink lingerie, and the color looks sexy as hell

against her skin. Her rosy-red nipples strain at the lace, and my mouth fucking waters at the sight of them.

“Keep going,” I say, barely recognizing the sound of my own voice. My accent always grows thicker when I’m minutes away from sliding into her.

She hooks her fingers under the dress that’s sitting at her waist and slowly slides it off her perfectly round hips and ass until it’s puddled at her feet, and all I can do is stare at the pink, lacy thong that isn’t doing shit to hide her smooth cunt from my very hungry gaze and the heels that have starred in all my fantasies since I first saw them on her.

“Goddamn,” I groan. “You’re so beautiful, *principessa*, and I should treat you like the angel you are, but instead I’m going to fuck you like the devil I am.”

Her lips part at my words, but she doesn’t look scared. No, my wife is looking at me like a woman who’s begging for all the filthy things I plan on doing to her tonight. I take a step closer, my painfully hard cock leading the way until it’s digging into her stomach. Trailing my fingers up her waist, I caress the sides of her breasts before filling my hands with them.

“I’m not stopping tonight until you pass out, Natalya.” She lets out a soft gasp when I lightly pinch her nipples. “When your body finally gives out, it’s going to be after you’re a sticky, filthy mess and there’s an ache in your pussy, mouth, and ass, sweetheart, because tonight I’m claiming every goddamn inch of you.”

Her blue eyes are heavy-lidded and already glazed over with lust. Leaning down, I give her top lip a soft bite. “Hang in there, wife. It’s going to be long night, and I don’t want to rush a second of this.”

She nods and wraps her arms and legs around me when I pick her up and lay her on the bed. I wasn’t lying when I said I was going to fuck her sore, but that doesn’t mean I’m not going to cherish her at the same time. Keeping my touch gentle, I kiss and lick and suck my way down her body, relieving her of her lingerie as I go until she’s in nothing but her heels, because those are definitely staying on.

By the time I bring my mouth to her sloppy wet pussy, she’s so close, she’s shaking, and all it takes is three firm licks and she’s coming all over my face. I fill my mouth with her juices, starved for the taste of her, and as soon as she starts to come down, I replace my tongue with my cock and slide into my wife for the first time.

Being inside her always feels like coming home, and I crave it constantly. There's never a second when I'm not wishing I was inside her. Cupping her face, I admire the way my wedding ring looks pressed against her flushed cheek. I'd always thought of marriage as a suffocating death sentence, but I'd been so damn wrong. It's not an end to anything—it's a beginning, and it's not stifling or suffocating—it's fucking liberating. She's mine, and I'm hers. What could be more perfect than that? Knowing I get to wake up next to her for the rest of my life is comforting, and knowing we're going to create a family together makes me excited for the future.

"That's right, wife," I say when I feel her tighten around me. "Soak your husband's cock, *principessa*."

When she opens her mouth to scream my name, I slide my thumb in, giving her something to suck on while she pulses around me, pulling me in deeper and forcing my body to let go with hers. She's impossible to resist, but lucky for us both, I still have enough stamina to make sure our night doesn't end here.

Sliding out of her, I lift up onto my knees while she gives me a lazy smile and eyes my semi-hard cock.

"You're impossible to resist, sweetheart, but I'm not even close to being done with you."

"Think you can go again so quickly?" she teases.

"Wrap that pouty mouth around me and find out."

Getting on her hands and knees, she crawls to me, giving me a mouthwatering view of her full breasts, bouncing gently with her movements, and the tantalizing curve of the ass that I'll soon be fucking.

I reach down and thread my fingers through her dark hair, watching as she parts her lips and takes me in. She bobs up and down, taking me in a slow rhythm that has me quickly forgetting my English as I murmur to her in Italian how much I love her and how fucking sexy I think she looks while choking on me. My wife is not a deep-throater. Every time she tries, she gags and blushes, and it's fucking adorable. I don't care that she can't take me all the way in. What's sexy is that she tries, that she *wants* to, and she can practice on me any damn time she wants.

Thrusting into her, I give her another inch until I feel her gag around me and her eyes spill over.

"Fuck, you're gorgeous," I groan, already fully hard and ready for more. I stay in her mouth until I see her hips start to rock, and I know she's feeling

frustrated and wishing she could come again.

“Turn around, *principessa*, show me that perfect ass of yours.”

She gives me one last hard suck as she raises her head and then laps at my slit before pulling back and releasing me. I run my thumb over her wet, swollen lips and then smack her ass hard enough to get her attention.

“Don’t make me ask again, sweetheart. Hands and knees, ass tilted up.”

She blushes but turns around, presenting her ass to me.

“More.” I smack her other cheek. “Rock those hips up and spread your knees wider.”

The soft, embarrassed groan she gives makes me laugh. Gripping her hips, I tilt her how I want her and then spread her cheeks so I can see everything that belongs to me.

“Fucking hell, baby,” I groan, drinking in the sight of her.

“Dom.”

The sound of her worried voice immediately has me leaning my body over hers so our faces are close together.

“I need you to trust me, *principessa*.”

“I do.”

I place my hands on top of hers, pinning her to the bed while I rock my hips and press the length of my cock against the crack of her ass.

“I promise you are going to love this.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then tell me, and I’ll spend the rest of the night buried inside your sweet pussy instead.” I suck her top lip between mine, groaning when she wiggles her ass against me. “Something tells me you’re going to like this. I know how much my wife likes to get filthy.”

She doesn’t bother denying it. She just smiles and gives my lip a teasing bite. “Just go easy on me, Dom.”

“Always, *principessa*.” I pull back up and grip her ass again. “At least for the first few thrusts.”

She turns her head to look at me over her shoulder. The look in her eyes clearly says she doesn’t find me funny, but when I give her a wink and smack her ass again, she practically purrs as she arches back even more.

“So fucking perfect,” I tell her, running a hand up her spine before fisting her long, dark hair. Bringing my other hand between her legs, I cup her sex and coat my fingers until they’re slippery wet. “Relax for me, sweetheart.”

She nods her head, letting out a soft moan when the movement has me pulling her hair even tighter. I play with her tight back hole, teasing her with the pad of my finger, reminding her how much she loves this, because as scared as she is, she's also eager and hungry and curious. When I press harder and slide my finger in, she lets out a sexy whimper, dipping her hips and revealing the seductive slope of her lower back.

"Not so scary now, is it?" I tease, finger-fucking her tight ass while she rocks against me. "Hmm?" I ask, adding in a second finger that makes her clutch the bedding and throw her head back. "Cat got your tongue, sweetheart?"

"Dom," she moans, "stop teasing me. This is embarrassing enough."

I slow my fingers down and run my eyes over her. "What the fuck could ever be embarrassing about this? My wife on her hands and knees, writhing from pleasure with her ass on full display, stretching to take my fingers like the good girl she is—this is perfection, *principessa*, and I don't ever want you to be embarrassed about anything we share. You wanting me is a good thing. Your body shaking because you're desperate for my cock is a very fucking good thing."

Sliding my fingers out, I grab onto her hip and press the head of my cock against her tight hole. I'm already covered in pre-cum again, making it easy for me to press inside. I fist her hair tighter and watch her spread around my head.

"Fuck, *principessa*, you are such a good girl, baby. You're taking me so goddamn good, and don't worry, no one will ever know this side of you but me. They'll see the princess who loves pretty dresses and the color pink, but I'll always see the *principessa* who moans so sweetly when I fill her pussy and slide into her ass. This part of you is just for me."

I slowly slide in, memorizing every detail of this moment, and when I'm fully seated inside her tight ass, I lean my body over hers, completely cocooning her much smaller frame.

"Give me your mouth."

She turns her head. Her breaths are shaky and her whole body is trembling beneath mine.

"Good girl," I praise, nipping at her lips while I very slowly start to fuck her.

I know she's scared I'm going to hurt her, but that's the last thing I want. I keep my thrusts slow, never giving her more than she can handle,

and when I bring my hand between her trembling thighs, she's so wet, she's dripping.

"I think my girl likes this," I murmur against her lips while I stroke her folds, teasing her with my fingers while I slide back into her ass. "Do you like me fucking your ass, *principessa*?"

She moans and nods her head.

"Use your words, baby. I want to hear you say it."

"I like it," she whispers.

I drag one finger along her clit, pulling another whimper from her. "You like what?"

She groans her frustration before saying, "I like you fucking my ass."

I smile at her cute, embarrassed face, but when I start to rub her in earnest, all the shyness falls away. I watch her change before my eyes, and within seconds she's kissing me fiercely while rocking her hips to meet my thrusts as my fingers work her clit. She comes with a muffled scream, and as soon as I feel her body tighten around me, I let go with her, wanting to share this with her.

I lose myself in my wife, giving everything I have to her, and when we both start to come down, I keep our bodies pressed together, because I can't stand the thought of us parting. I grow soft inside her, feeling my heart race against her back while we both catch our breath.

"I can't move," she finally moans.

"Good. That means I did it right."

She laughs and turns her head to face me. "That also means you can carry me to the bath before I pass out."

"Gladly, *principessa*. It'll give you a chance to rest before round two."

"Wait, what?"

I laugh at the wide-eyed look she's giving me. "You haven't passed out yet, sweetheart," I remind her.

Slowly sliding out of her, I sit up and take her pink heels off, massaging her sore feet until she's blissed-out and looking cute as hell. Before she can fall asleep, I pick her up and carry her into the bathroom. A nice soak should have her feeling better, and then I'm going to do what I promised. My wife will be exhausted, too tired to even keep her eyes open, by the time I'm finished with her. Judging by the sleepy look she's giving me, it's not going to take much.

Keeping her held to my chest, I lower us both into the hot water, smiling when she sighs against my neck.

“I love you, Dom,” she whispers, already more than half asleep.

“I love you too, *principessa*.” I kiss her forehead and run my fingers through her hair. “Thanks for coming into my life and turning it completely upside down.”

She laughs and kisses my cheek. “I’ll always try my best to keep you on your toes. No one wants a boring life.”

“Life will never be boring with you.” I run my hand down her body until it’s resting on her stomach. “You’ve given me so much, far more than a man like me deserves.”

“You deserve everything.”

I breathe in her scent and kiss her again. “I just want you. I want to raise a family with you, and I want to grow old with you. I don’t give a shit about anything else.”

She gives a soft laugh and pats my cheek. “That’s very sweet, but there’s no separating you from your job.” Her hand slips beneath the water to rest on mine. “We’re your family, but you have another that’s counting on you, and I’ll do everything I can to help you run it.”

“I don’t want you involved in any of it.”

“We’re married now,” she reminds me. “Partners in everything for life.”

“I’m pretty sure I didn’t agree to that. You have me, every part of me, for life, but I never agreed to let you put yourself in danger any more than it already is.”

She shrugs a wet shoulder. “I just mean I’m here if you need me. I’m not going to grab a gun and start going after rival families.”

“Thank god,” I groan, already imagining the million different ways she could get hurt.

“But,” she says, giving me a smile, “you can still talk to me about things. You can let me know what you’re thinking. I might be able to help.”

I think about what she’s offering, and she’s not wrong. With her brilliant mind and inability to ever mince her words with me, she would be a huge asset, and I like the idea of sharing this with her. I don’t want to keep a part of my life hidden from her, or at least not completely hidden, because I still refuse to mention anything that will cause her too much worry or stress or put her in danger, but I can give her some things. I can share more than I have been.

“Okay, *principessa*,” I tell her. “I’ll tell you as much as I’m able to.”

“Can we go to *La Dolce Vita*?”

I laugh, already starting to regret my decision. “Maybe, but you’re not wearing some tiny goddamn dress if we do.”

“So possessive,” she murmurs with a smile.

“When it comes to you? Always.”

I pull her back against me again and grab a washcloth.

“Now, rest up, sweetheart. This is the only break you’re getting.”

She smiles and relaxes against me, letting me take care of her like I want. With my pregnant wife in my arms, I have everything that I could ever need or want. They’re my life and my future, and I’ll do everything I can to keep them safe because my life is no longer just about me and the mafia I run. She tore that to shreds when she walked into my life. Natalya Alessi brought me to my knees, and I couldn’t be happier about it. She’s my life, and I no longer see that as a weakness. The woman in my arms is my strength, and together we’re going to build a goddamn empire.

Epilogue

Three Months Later
Natalya

“Are you hungry?”
I smile at Lucia when I walk into the kitchen. Before I can even answer, she’s grabbing me some brioche she made earlier and fixing me a sandwich.

“I’m not that hungry,” I try and tell her, but she waves me off with a smile and adds some fresh fruit to the plate. I swear she and Dominic are on a mission to make me gain as much weight as possible. He denies it, but he can’t ever deny it with a straight face.

“Thank you, Lucia,” I tell her, returning her smile when she hands me the plate and a glass of orange juice. “I’m going to eat it in Dominic’s office.”

“Tell him I’m making his favorite lasagna for supper.”

“I will,” I promise her and then take my plate down the hall to the door that always used to intimidate me. Now, I just give a soft knock and walk in before shutting the door behind me. The curtains are pulled back, and the windows are raised, letting in a warm breeze and the sweet scent of the roses I planted along the house.

My husband is smiling at me from behind his desk while he talks on the phone. He hooks a finger at me and pushes his chair back so I can sit on his

lap. Setting my plate down on the enormous desk, I can't help but remember the time he ate me out on it. He notices my blush and kisses my cheek before nuzzling his nose in my hair, breathing me in.

While he talks in Italian to whoever is on the line, he nudges my plate closer, encouraging me to eat. I smile at his worry and take a bite. His office used to be devoid of anything sentimental, but now there are photos all over the place. Snapshots from our honeymoon in Italy are sitting on his bookshelves, along with a couple of framed photos of him and his sister. I smile when I see the one of her giving him rabbit ears while they both laugh. On the wall across from us is a large, framed photo from our wedding. The photographer captured our highly inappropriate kiss, and she'd snapped a photo right as Dominic was pulling back and cupping my face like I'm the most precious thing in the world while I stare up at him with big eyes and pink-stained cheeks. It's his favorite photo, and he'd immediately had it blown up and framed.

The smaller framed photo on his desk is one that I surprised him with. It's the photo from my Uncle Matvey's wedding, the one where he's holding me as a baby. He's looking down at me, and I'm gripping his finger and looking up at him. It's my favorite photo.

It might be weird to some, but I know Dominic and I were always supposed to be together. It's a hell of an age gap, but at the end of the day, it's just a damn number, and life is too short to worry about shit like that.

I take another bite, and it earns me a kiss on the temple. I lean back against him, loving the way his hand always goes to rest possessively on my belly. I'm growing rounder, and he's loving every damn second of it.

He keeps up his fast conversation while I eat and think about how damn sexy he sounds speaking his native language. I'm not at all surprised when he slips one of his hands under my dress so he can touch me skin to skin. His fingers caress my small baby bump while I finish almost everything on my plate and he grows hard beneath my ass.

When he finally hangs up and tosses his phone on the desk, the first thing he does is cup my face with his free hand and turn me towards him for a kiss. It's slow and deep and leaves me breathless and wanting more.

"I love how pregnant you're looking, *principessa*."

I laugh and cup his face, running my fingers through the thick stubble. "I'm only going to get bigger. Soon I'll be too big for your lap."

He smiles and kisses me again. “Never, sweetheart, and you’d better get bigger, way bigger.” His fingers trail a path along my skin. “Our daughter needs to grow a lot more, and so do you.”

We found out last week that we’re having a girl, and I swear Dominic hasn’t stopped smiling since. When we’d told my dad he was going to have a granddaughter, he’d actually hugged Dominic, and even though he denies it, I know I saw a couple of tears. The two of them are already buying things for the nursery, and it’s a good thing my favorite color is pink, because our baby is going to be surrounded by it for the foreseeable future.

“I thought for sure you’d be disappointed we aren’t having a boy.”

“Oh, we’re having boys, sweetheart, a houseful of them.” He gives me a smug grin and a wink. “We’re just having a daughter first. I plan on keeping you pregnant. I’m a lot older than you, *principessa*. We don’t have any time to waste.”

He’s not entirely wrong, but that doesn’t mean I want to jump straight into another pregnancy after giving birth, but that’s a discussion for another day, so I just return his kiss and snuggle in deeper against him while he feeds me the last of my strawberries. Not cleaning my plate isn’t an option when he’s around.

“Good girl,” he tells me when I’ve finished off the last bite and downed the rest of my orange juice.

“So what was the call about? Everything okay?”

He sighs and leans back in his chair, keeping his arms securely around me. “Everything’s fine. The upper level is almost complete on *La Dolce Vita*, and several men are already buying their spots at the tables.”

“You’ll need to beef up security. I’m guessing some of those guys aren’t going to be too happy when they start losing massive amounts of money.”

He smiles at my worrying, and I can’t resist kissing the chiseled line of his stubbled jaw.

“Don’t worry, Dario is already taking care of it. There will be extra security, and no weapons are allowed on the second floor.”

“You won’t be armed?”

He kisses my scrunched up brow. “Relax, *principessa*. The rules don’t apply to me or my men.”

“Okay, good, because I have a feeling a lot of dangerous men are going to want to get in on this. Look at how many get involved in my dad’s underground fighting. What is it about men and money?”

“It’s power, sweetheart. Men love power, and dangerous men love it even more.”

His finger grazes the top of my panties, slowly dipping inside to run along my skin.

“Maybe you should stay home while you’re pregnant. It’s safer here.”

I roll my eyes at him because we’ve been over this before.

“Be happy I’m talking it out, sweetheart. I could just tie you to the damn bed.”

That gets a laugh out of me while he raises a dark brow.

“I’ve shot people for less than that.”

I smile and cup his face, bringing him closer. “Yes, but you wouldn’t shoot me.”

“Never, baby.” He grabs my hips and moves me so I’m straddling him and we’re chest to chest. My dress rides up my thighs, and he can’t take his eyes off the swell of my breasts. I’ve grown an entire cup size since getting pregnant, and we’re both enjoying the hell out of it.

“The rules don’t apply to you either, *principessa*, not that it matters.” He gives a soft laugh and nuzzles his face between my breasts with a groan. “You’d just break them anyway.”

I thread my fingers in his hair and rock my hips, grinding against the hard length of him. “I would,” I agree, knowing he’s right.

He grips my hips, digging his fingers into my flesh, reminding me of the first night I’d spent in his bedroom and the Bernini sculpture I couldn’t look away from. Unlike Hades, Dominic didn’t steal me away and force himself on me. I’d gone after him, and I’d teased and taunted him until he took what I so freely wanted to give him, and I’d do it again in a heartbeat, because he was always meant to be mine.

This man and the baby that’s growing inside me are my future, and there’s nothing more precious than that.

“My willful wife,” he teases. Keeping his dark eyes on mine, he brings his hands up, hooking his fingers under the spaghetti straps at my shoulders and gently tugging them down until my breasts are exposed. His eyes rake over the pink, lacy bra I’m wearing, and when he fills his hands with me and runs his thumbs over my aching nipples, I moan his name and arch my back for him.

“You’re always so defiant, sweetheart,” he says, giving my nipples a soft pinch that has me grinding harder against him as he gives a deep,

masculine laugh at my reaction, “but so fucking submissive if an orgasm is involved.”

Leaning closer, he wraps his mouth around one of my breasts, sucking hard and filling his mouth with me. I can feel the wet heat of his tongue through the lace, and all I can think about is getting more.

“Stop teasing me, Dom,” I moan. “Please give me what I need.”

His response is a gentle bite before he lifts me up and sets me on the edge of his desk. Standing up, he steps between my thighs, already working his belt off.

“I want to see my nice little submissive wife,” he teases, unzipping his pants and freeing his thick, hard cock. I bite my lip at the sight of him so ready for me, already thinking about how damn good it’s going to feel when he slides into me. I crave the sting of him, the burn of being stretched too wide, and the devilish grin on his face makes it obvious he knows it.

In one quick motion, my panties are ripped off and tossed aside and he’s pressed against my slit, ready to take what’s his.

“Now show me what a good girl you can be, *principessa*.”

And I do.

With my husband’s powerful body wrapped around mine, I submit to him completely, body and soul. I’ve never been able to resist him, not that I’d ever want to. Dominic’s very presence demands obedience, and I’ve always been more than happy to give it to him, especially when the rewards are so damn earth shattering.

When I hear Dominic’s deep voice in my ear, a fast string of Italian that sounds like pure sex to me, I give him what he wants and let go, showing him just what a good girl I can be. He follows me with a deep groan and a hard thrust that locks our bodies together, and I never want this moment to end.

With my arms and legs wrapped tightly around him, I whisper, “I love you,” in a shaky, breathless voice.

“I love you too, *principessa*,” he whispers back before bringing his lips back to mine.

This isn’t the life I imagined myself having—it’s a million times better, and I wouldn’t change a single thing about it. With that thought firmly in place, I kiss him again as he scoops me into his arms to carry me back to our room. There’s still a few hours before supper, and I’m guessing we’ll be spending them in bed.

With a smile on my face, I kiss my husband and nestle my face against his neck so I can breathe in his scent, more than happy to lose myself in him again.

THE END

Thank you so much for reading! In case you missed the story of Lev and his brothers, you can read their books [here](#)! This series must be read in order, so please start with Roman's book: [Paved in Blood](#).

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About the Author

Just like her last name, Sonja loves morally grey alphas with a hidden heart of gold. She loves strong men with mile-wide soft spots for the women they love and who will stop at nothing to keep them safe.

She writes mainly dark mafia steamy romances where the lines between good and bad blur into a beautiful, sexy shade of grey.

Zero cheating and HEAs are always guaranteed!

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